

For the first few months of 2020, we are working on a new format for Life Group discussion guides. These new guides will still use the Bible passages and topics from the weekend message, but they will also be designed to help your Life Group members learn how to study the Bible on their own. We will be using the acronym HEAR as a way to teach people to read the Bible and to organize these discussion guides. HEAR stands for **H**ighlight the passage, **E**xplain the passage, **A**pply the passage, and **R**espond to the passage.

Each week, there will be a page to print off for each member of your group. The printed sheet will have the Bible passage you'll discuss and some questions in the margins to guide them in examining those verses.

Additionally, there will be a leader's guide that will give you helpful notes on the passage (i.e. background information and definitions) as well as discussion questions to lead your group. These don't need to be printed for each member of your group.

These guides are designed to be discussed BEFORE the sermon, so the group can discuss the passage before the pastor shares his insights. However, they can just as easily be used after the weekend message.

Our hope is these tools will (a) help your group members learn to study/read their Bibles outside of the group and (b) give you a helpful outline for facilitating the group discussion. If you have comments or questions about the new format, we'd love to hear your constructive feedback. Send your feedback to me at

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In the months of January and February, we will be looking at making first and next steps towards true change in the areas of purpose, mental health, finances, and relationships.

How to Use This Discussion Guide

- Use the summary statement for each week to quickly understand the text's theme. You can use that as a reference point to help guide your discussion or bring it back if your group begins to get off topic.
- Use the prayer prompt at the end of each guide to help you close in prayer.

Additionally, here are some tips and guidelines to help you lead these discussions:

1. **Choose the questions that best fit your group and your time constraints.** There are a lot of questions in this guide and your group may not be able to discuss them all. That's okay! You don't have to ask all of them. Before your group begins, choose the questions that are most likely to help your group understand what God is saying in the text and how to apply it to their lives.
2. **Prepare for your group time by reading the passages and the notes in a study Bible.** A good study Bible can give you some insights into the passages and how they connect to the whole book or the whole story of the Bible.
3. **Begin every group meeting with prayer.** We can only understand and apply God's Word with the help of the Holy Spirit. So, invite the Spirit to open your hearts and minds to what He says to His people.
4. **Keep the conversation focused on Scripture as much as possible.** Some people may want to bring in their opinions or continually refer to what the teaching pastor said during his message. This is helpful in small doses, but the goal of this discussion guide is to help you determine what God is saying in His Word. Encourage the group to continue to return to the Scripture. One way to do that is by saying, "That's a great insight! Where do you see that in the Scripture we're studying?"
5. **Encourage participation, but don't let anyone dominate.** Encourage everyone to share insights, ask questions, and read aloud. But don't allow any one person – even yourself, the leader – to monopolize the time. Some people are just unaware of themselves and how much they speak, so gently encourage them to listen and make space for others to talk.
6. **Help your group members to be specific in the application of Scripture.** It is easy to generalize when we talk about the Bible and how to apply it. So ask your group members specific questions – for example, "What part of the world do you sense God wants you to pray for? How will you do that? How will you make that a habit?"

We pray that you will hear God speak through His Word and that His Spirit will move you to obey Him. The Word of God – the Bible – lets us know the God who loves us and saves us. May this discussion guide help you and your Life Group to become more immersed in His story.

Date of Sermon: January 11-12, 2020

Topic of Sermon: Moving from purposeless living to purposeful living

Main Passage: Romans 12:1-3

BEFORE your group meeting:

- Look up the main passage in a study Bible and read the study notes
- Print off or send the “Group Member Guide” (page 4) for your group members
- Review the “Group Member Guide” for yourself
- Have enough pens for each group member.

Topic of Life Group Meeting: A follower of Jesus has a transformed heart and leads a purposeful life of sacrifice in His name.

Icebreakers (optional)

- What are some sacrifices you make in your everyday life?
- How do those sacrifices transform you?

Leader’s Note: Introduce the next part of the group meeting. You can read this introduction or put it in your own words:

“Today, we’re going to spend a few minutes studying the focal passage on our own before we discuss it as a group. I’ve printed out a copy of the Bible passage for you. There are some questions in the margins to help you. Spend most of your time on the Highlight and Explain questions. Feel free to mark up, underline or highlight the passage. We’ll spend most of our time discussing Romans 12:1-3. But when focusing any passage, it’s important to look at the verses before and after it so we can better understand what the verses are saying. So the passage has some verses before and after our passage. I’m going to give us about 5 minutes to do this. Let me begin by praying that God will open our minds and hearts to His Word.”

When you come back together, use the questions below to guide the discussion.

HIGHLIGHT the Passage

- What key ideas, words or phrases stood out to you from the passage today? What is the significance of those?
- Did this passage raise any questions for you?
- How would you summarize this passage in your own words? Would anyone else add or emphasize something to that summary?

EXPLAIN the Passage

- What are some things this passage revealed about God? His nature, His work, or His character?
- According to Paul, what does God distribute to His people? (See verse 3.) Is this a new concept for you?
- What are some things this passage revealed about people?
- What did Paul (the author of this passage) tell his readers to give up? According to Paul, why should they?
- Why is it easy to be conformed to the ways of the world? What does that say about the world’s relationship to God?
- Did Paul believe that people could transform on their own? Why or why not?
- How does this passage redefine our purpose in life? Explain.

APPLY the Passage

- What truth from this passage do you need to cling to? What makes that truth significant to you?
- By God’s power, what is God calling you to change in how you think, speak, or act?
- What evidence can people see that God has transformed you?
- In what areas of your life do you find it most difficult to fight conformity to the world?
- What is God calling you to sacrifice for His sake this week?

RESPOND to the Passage

- Finish your time in prayer, praying that God would be constantly transforming you and your group. Pray that He would reveal your purpose in living for His glory.

COMMENTARY NOTES ON THE MAIN PASSAGE

12:1. Paul urged all believers to present themselves as a “living sacrifice.” Jesus had given Himself as the once-and-for-all Sacrifice for sin on the cross. Believers therefore were to live in light of Jesus’ all-sufficient sacrifice, bringing glory to God. The idea of Christians’ presenting their “bodies” as a living sacrifice harked back to the discussion of the body being dead to sin because of the life-giving presence of the Spirit (see 8:10). To live by the Spirit is to offer oneself completely and daily as a “holy and pleasing sacrifice.”

Paul further explained that living as a holy, pleasing sacrifice was a believer’s “spiritual worship.” The word rendered spiritual also can be understood as meaning logical or reasonable. The Greek word translated as worship often was used to refer to carrying out religious duties or services. So, Paul taught that in light of God’s gracious redemption (by the mercies of God), living as a sacrifice was the logical and pleasing way for Christians to serve God.

12:2. As Christians, we’re also to please God with our minds. The temptation is to go along with the dominant attitudes of the “age,” to adopt the prevailing cultural worldview characterized by self-worship (sin). The apostle urged his readers to reject worldliness and “to be transformed by the renewing of the mind.”

In the original Greek, the phrase “be transformed” is a present passive imperative form. This form suggests three important truths. First, the present tense describes a continuing action. Transformation of our thinking and attitudes is an ongoing, lifelong endeavor. Second, the passive voice indicates that the indwelling Spirit is the Source of our transformation. We can’t transform ourselves but rather must be transformed. Third, however, is the truth suggested by the imperative that we must consciously place ourselves at the Spirit’s disposal for transformation to happen. The Spirit will not transform us against our will.

The result of having our minds renewed by the Spirit is to grow in our ability “to discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.” The word translated “discern” literally means to prove by testing. Christian living is not about emptying the mind—as some religions claim—but rather about thinking intelligently and logically in accordance with God’s ways. God wants His people to know what pleases Him because by living according to His ways we will experience the most abundant life possible (see John 10:10).

12:3 As part of a renewed mind, the Christian is to think wisely about himself and what his function is to be in the body of Christ (the church). Measure of faith appears mean different apportionments of faith, given by God. So, Paul exhorts Christians to be humble and to use what God has given for the good of the body.

Life Group Member Guide

Focal Passage: Romans 12:1-3 (ESV)

Passage in Context: Romans 11:30-12:5 (ESV)



Bible-Reading Tip: When reading a selection of the Bible, read a few verses before and after that selection. Doing this will help you understand the selection correctly and in its context. The bolded verses below will be the focus of this group meeting.

³⁰ For just as you (the Jews) were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their (non-Jewish people) disobedience, ³¹ so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. ³² For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

³⁴ “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”

³⁵ “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”

³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

12 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

³ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

HEAR Bible Reading Method

HIGHLIGHT the passage

- Underline any repeated words or key ideas you see.
- Note any questions you have about what you read.
- In 2-3 sentences, summarize what was said or what happened.

EXPLAIN the passage

- What was revealed about God? His character, desires, and/or actions?
- What was revealed about people? What we are/do or what we should be/do?

APPLY the passage

- From this reading, what truth do you need to embrace?
- By God’s power, how will you THINK, SPEAK, or ACT differently based on what you read?

RESPOND to the passage

- Talk to God about what you’ve seen and learned in this passage.
- Ask Him to help you apply the truth to your life.