

Romans 12 | Agape
5 Week D-Group Curriculum
Coba Canales



Week 1: Living Sacrifice

"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." — Romans 12:1

When I say the word, 'worship', what comes to mind? Many of us might immediately think of a group of people on a stage playing instruments, singing, with eyes closed, hands raised, and in a church—others may think of your Spotify playlist that reminds you of your favorite worship music. Though music and singing may connect us with a heart of worship, Romans 12:1 reminds us that true and proper worship goes much deeper than singing and instruments—it's actually about a life fully surrendered to God. Here's a brief definition of a "living sacrifice"—*"To live sacrificially, laying down your own personal desires, interests, and agendas, for the sake of offering true and acceptable worship unto God"*. Because of all that God has done for us through Christ Jesus (summarized by the Apostle Paul in Romans 1-11), we are urged to live our entire lives—our time, energy, thoughts, resources, present, and future—as a continual act of worship. This is very different than a version of Christian faith that has been hijacked by our American consumer culture telling us that faith in Christ will earn us certain things. In contrast, faith in Christ means surrendering my notion that my life is all about me.

Personal Reflection Question

- 1) When have you felt most aligned with the will of God?
- 2) When have you felt most disconnected from God and out of alignment with His will?

Group Discussion Questions

- 1) How is this definition of worship different from what you have typically thought of when you hear the word 'worship'?

- 2) How does the concept of a 'living sacrifice' differ from what some may think as the point of Christian faith? What other theologies exist that contrast Romans 12:1?
- 3) How is presenting yourself as a living sacrifice challenging to you in your daily Christian practice?
- 4) How has this Scripture verse challenged you to live as a living sacrifice?

Spiritual Discipline

- This week consider a discipline such as fasting which trains you to go without something you would typically crave. Identify something that would be difficult to go without for a week—it would be even better if that item or habit is something that distracts you from the true presence of God.

Preparing for Next Week

- For next week, be sure to read Romans 12:1-2 and come ready to discuss verse 2.

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Week 2: Set Apart

"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." — Romans 12:2

This summer I was working on a project in my backyard, a clubhouse for my kids. I gathered a bunch of scrap wood and purchased a few extra pieces of lumber and got started. As I got to building the railing I figured I'd measure the height, cut one piece, and then use that piece to be my template for the rest of the railing—about another 20 pieces. As I finished my last cut and started to install the pieces, I realized that I had cut all 21 pieces too short 😞 My fault for measuring wrong and using the wrong template! Romans 12:2 tells us, "be careful what kind of template you're using for your life!" The world around us wants us to conform to all its patterns, values, beliefs, and habits while we are called to be trans-formed by the renewing of our minds (no-os= ways of thinking).

Personal Reflection Question

- 1) Who is one person in your life that you've wanted to emulate and why?

Group Discussion Questions

- 1) What does 'conforming to the pattern of this world' mean to you?
- 2) Can you think of ways that you have been tempted to conform to worldly patterns and ways of thinking, believing, feeling, speaking, and living?
- 3) How might you overcome the temptation to conform to cultural norms & expectations?
- 4) What kind of transformation are you praying and hoping for in your own spiritual life?

- 5) How does non-conformity and spiritual transformation lead to knowing and approving God's perfect will?

Spiritual Discipline

- Confession—Consider sharing a little more in-depth with one person a way in which your life has too easily conformed to the pattern of this world. Write (or speak) a short declarative statement about how you will resist conformity and practice counter-cultural living for the sake of the Gospel.

Preparing for Next Week

- Read Romans 12:3-8

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Week 3: One Body

"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."
— Romans 12:3-8

When my wife, Drea, and I were in high school we were part of the same youth ministry leadership team. It wasn't a big leadership team—there were about 4 or 5 of us. One of our friends was a ridiculously gifted singer and worship leader. Another one of our friends was an extremely talented dancer and led a dance-ministry for our youth. I would teach bible study on occasion and enjoyed leading announcements. One day, Drea said, "I don't think I belong on this team. I'm not a very good singer—I don't like public speaking very much—I'm not incredibly gifted at dancing...I'm not sure if I'm cut out for leadership!" Almost simultaneously we all began to list all the things she was particularly gifted at that we weren't—organization, administration, communication, recruitment, creative design—all gifts that without them our youth ministry would have been a disaster. She's now a successful entrepreneur, founder, and business owner of a Christian non-profit company. Thinking of ourselves with 'sober judgment' means not thinking higher or lower of ourselves than we ought to. It also helps us know how to put our God-given gifts into use within the context of a team, the body of Christ—as a significant member.

Personal Reflection Question

- 1) Think of a time when you tried to do something on your own but you should have asked for help.

Group Discussion Questions

- 1) Other than heart, brain, and spine—what is the most important part of your body and why?
- 2) Can you think of a moment when your estimation of your value and gifts was lower than it should have been?
- 3) Can you think of a moment when your estimation of your value and gifts was higher than it should have been?
- 4) What gifts and talents has God given you, specifically? How can those be used in the Kingdom of God to bless others?
- 5) What is one way you can begin to call out (positively) the gifts and talents of those around you, starting today?

Spiritual Discipline

- Consider completing a spiritual gifts inventory together as a group — following is a free one: <https://giftstest.com/>
- After completing the survey and reading the definitions (and Scriptures) for each spiritual gift, how might your gifts be complimented by another person's gifts as part of the body of Christ?

Preparing for Next Week

- Read Romans 12:9-16

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Week 4: Agape

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

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited." — Romans 12:9-16

The word "love" used in Romans 12:9 is actually the Greek word "Agape" which refers to a kind of love that is self-sacrificial. Think of the love a mother has for her child, for instance. Mothers do everything they can to feed, nurture, provide for, protect, and raise up their children. They don't expect too much in return and they definitely aren't loving their children so they can get some kind of reward. The love most of us are familiar with in many relationships is reciprocal love. As long as our needs are being met then we're willing to stay in the relationship. However, the moment it seems that our efforts aren't being adequately reciprocated, we're tempted to go somewhere else and look for someone who could meet our needs the way we want them to. Paul is challenging the churches in Rome to learn to love with a deeper kind of love. It's the kind of love that would propel the only perfect human to be crucified on a cross so that hopeless strangers like us might have a chance to reconcile with our Creator. It's the kind of love that would lead us into friendships with people very different than us. It's the kind of love that would cause us to use our resources to care for those in need.

Personal Reflection Question

- 1) Reading through this passage, what verse, phrase, or word seems to really speak to you?

Group Discussion Questions

- 1) What's the most sincere love (Agape) you've ever experienced?
- 2) Why is Christian hospitality so important in the life of the church and the body of Christ?
- 3) Read v. 14 again. Is that easy or difficult for you to do? Why or why not?
- 4) How can your social interactions be stretched to include more people who come from different lived experiences than you?

Spiritual Discipline

- Consider giving something away or buying a gift for someone. It could be as simple as a sandwich for someone who could use it. Pray about who you'd like to bless with a gift and pray that God would reveal to you what you should give away or buy.

Preparing for Next Week

- Read Romans 12:17-21

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Week 5: Peaceful Living

"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 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. 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.'*

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." — Romans 12:17-21

In the modern era, transcendent revolutionary leaders Mahatma Gandhi, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Nelson Mandela demonstrated the resolve to conquer hate through love. Gandhi said, "an eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind." Mandela said, "Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies." Dr. King said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." All three of these leaders and the quotes attributed to them point back to this early Christian wisdom in Romans 12—live at peace with others and overcome evil with good. This is hard to do in a culture that says we need to 'fight fire with fire' and be sure that wrongdoers get what they deserve. This radical philosophy makes the call to Christian discipleship a narrow road and one that our human flesh and nature is perpetually at odds with. What will win out?

Personal Reflection Question

Group Discussion Questions

- 1) Which of the three quotes listed in the devotional reflection resonate with you & why?

- 2) Do you think verses 17 and 18 are possible? Have a group discussion about it.
- 3) How does Paul's teaching on how we should treat our enemies challenge your natural response to conflict?
- 4) Who, in your life, is hard to forgive? What might God be speaking to you about this situation?

Spiritual Discipline

- Forgiveness- who is someone that needs your forgiveness? They've wronged you and you've held a grudge, bitterness, resentment, or maybe you've just decided in your heart that they're not forgivable. Pray and ask God to speak to you about this situation and lead you to action that reflects this radical call to love.