



Practical Christianity

Being a Christ-Follower in Current Culture

Discipleship Guide



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WELCOME

At GracePoint, our mission is to be people who...

Encounter Grace

Grow in Grace

Give Grace

“Why can’t we all just get along?” If you’ve ever asked that question about Christians or the Church, the Apostle Paul provides a lot of food for thought, prayer, and self-examination. In this series on Romans chapters 13-15, we’ll explore connections between submission to governing authorities, loving our neighbor as ourselves, being a blessing to others rather than a stumbling block, and overall, how the hope we have in Jesus Christ—by the power of His Holy Spirit—is what allows us to live in the unity God has intended for us all along.

By His mercy,
Pastor Serenity Miller

OVERVIEW

Series Goal: To become people who love one another and bear with one another in unity through hope in Jesus Christ.

Part 1—Introduction: Authority

Romans 13:1-7

Part 2—Authority: Right Response

Romans 13:1-7

Part 3—Love: A Debt You Owe

Romans 13:8-10

Part 4—Wake Up: See the Signs of the Times

Romans 13:11-14

Part 5—Live in Light of the Times

Romans 13:11-14

Part 6—Get What Matters

Romans 14:1-4

Part 7—Convinced but Considerate

Romans 14:5-12

Part 8—Don't be a Bump!

Romans 14:13-18

Part 9—A Time to Speak, A Time to be Quiet

Romans 14:19-23

Part 10—A Healthy Spiritual Profile

Romans 14:23b-15:6

Part 11—Unity: God's Relational Goal

Romans 15:5-12

Part 12—God of Hope

Romans 15:13

A WORD FROM PASTOR STEVE

Romans chapters 13-15 are instrumental teachings on how to live out practical Christianity. These passages present timeless truths—principles and instructions about how we, as followers of Jesus, are to submit to authorities, live with others, and experience hope.

It is such relevant teaching for the world we live in. I encourage you to take these teachings to heart and put them into practice.

My prayer is that you encounter God's grace, grow in His grace, and become more equipped to give His grace to others.

Love in Jesus,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "P. Steve". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Pastor Steve Norby

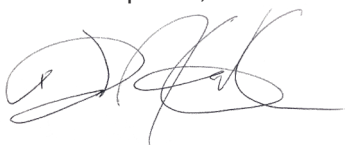
A NOTE TO MENTORS AND GROUP LEADERS

This discipleship guide has been designed with GracePoint growth groups and mentoring relationships in mind. We hope you'll follow along each week, and that each section will help you engage in discipleship at the group level, the one-on-one level, and the individual level. The format builds on our mission statement: *Encounter Grace, Grow in Grace, and Give Grace.*

- The **Encounter** section is designed to *reflect* on biblical truth.
- The **Grow** section is a chance to *engage* with the message.
- The **Give** section is where we begin to *apply* what we're learning to our relationships with God and other people.

We realize groups and mentoring pairs might not make it through all of the questions every week. We encourage you to review each section ahead of time and pick the questions that fit your dynamic the best. In turn, please encourage one another to continue using this guide outside of your weekly setting, diving in deeper with family members, friends, or coworkers, *and* on your own in prayer before God. May this series be a means of His work in your life.

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dave Hopewell', written in a cursive style.

Pastor Dave Hopewell

Big Thought

Christianity thrives when Christ followers make hard choices to obey God's will.

Icebreaker

Think back to childhood—how did you tend to respond to authority figures? How has your attitude changed or stayed the same over time?

Encounter (Reflect)

1. The chapter of Romans 12 ends by saying, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (v. 21). The apostle Paul then goes right into saying, "Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities..." (13:1). What is the connection between these two thoughts?

2. Who are the governing authorities Paul is referring to? Why did the recipients of Paul's letter need to be instructed about submitting to these authorities? (Hint: Consult a Bible commentary or use an online search engine to help explore a historical/cultural perspective.)

3. Consider times in the life of Jesus when we see Him submitting to authority (ex: the authority of His mother, Mary; the authority of Jewish traditions, like temple worship; the authority of Roman taxation and trial; the authority of God's will for His sacrifice; etc). What do these scenarios have in common? How does Jesus' example help us understand when to submit and when not to submit?

Grow (Engage)

4. “The authorities that exist have been established by God” (v. 2), Paul says—meaning the authorities that were in place at the time, authorities many religious zealots would have wanted to rebel against. What authorities do you struggle to accept as established by God?

5. What are the consequences of rebelling against established authorities in your context (ex. federal, state, or local laws; workplace leaders or employee policies; school administrators or teachers; parents or other family members; etc)? How do these consequences “bring judgment” (v. 2) on those who rebel?

6. Consider Israel’s history with kings, judges, and foreign nations, as told across the story of the Old Testament. In what ways has God used governments and leaders (especially unwanted or wicked ones!) in the lives of His people? How might an undesirable authority in your life be positioned by God to shape godly character in you (v. 3-4)?

Give (Apply)

7. In today’s outspoken, often disrespectful environment of public opinion about government leaders and political parties, what does it mean to “be subject” (v. 1) to the “authorities that exist” (v. 2)? How does submission in your life benefit the people around you?

8. In some cases, for Christ followers, submitting to authorities might mean we can't do what they want, so as a result, we submit to the known consequences of disobeying. How can you model submission to the authority of God in the ways you interact with governing authorities?

9. How does submission to the governing authorities instituted by God result in the countercultural kind of victory (moved by an urgency of love) that we read about in Romans 12:21—"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good"?

Takeaway: ACTS Prayer

Consider praying these words together as a group while you are gathered, and daily on your own before the Lord this week.

A = ADORATION: Heavenly Father, You are Sovereign God and Lord Almighty—all authority, in heaven and on earth, belongs to You.

C = CONFESSION: Christ Jesus, I struggle to even comprehend Your perfect submission to God's authority, much less live it out in my own life.

T = THANKSGIVING: Lord Jesus, I thank You that in You is victory over all things—that I, too, am more than a conqueror in Your name.

S = SUPPLICATION: Holy Spirit, be my kingdom eyes to see the good You are working in me, through God's established authorities.

Notes/Prayer Requests

AUTHORITY: RIGHT RESPONSE

Romans 13:1-7
Sept. 19, 2021

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Big Thought

Submission to authorities brings opportunities to stand for Christ.

Icebreaker

Describe a time when you had to stand by a hard, right decision. What were the consequences? What made it worthwhile?

Encounter (Reflect)

1. Twice in Romans 13:4, Paul refers to governing authorities as “God’s servant(s).” Considering Paul does not differentiate here, between godly and ungodly rulers, what purpose do *all* types of authorities serve, according to this verse?

2. Paul instructs that it’s not only suggested, but “necessary” (v. 5) for Christians to submit to the authorities in place—“not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.” What’s the difference between these two types of submission?

3. According to v. 6, why do Christians pay taxes? What reasoning does Paul provide for his instruction in v. 7? Remembering that in Paul’s context, taxes were paid to the oppressive Roman government, how would submission in this matter be for the good of God’s people?

Grow (Engage)

4. For what reason do rulers “bear the sword” (v. 4)? If you are fearful or nervous around authorities, what might that response be telling you? What mental, emotional, or physical signals do you experience that could be bringing attention to an area of your life God wants to transform?

5. If submission to the authorities is a means of avoiding “possible punishment” (v. 5), what should be your response, “as a matter of conscience,” in cases where you know you have done wrong—intentionally or unintentionally?

6. How does it make you feel to think of paying taxes as a biblical mandate (v. 6)? Besides the financial obligations of taxes and revenue, in what ways do you find it challenging to respond with the “respect” and “honor” Paul says is owed to governing authorities (v. 7)? How have past or present resentments (yours or those of others) impacted the way you respond to authority?

Give (Apply)

7. Consider the areas in your life where you carry some authority—whether as a workplace leader; a representative of an organization; a parent or grandparent; an older sibling; a team captain or group facilitator; a volunteer or coordinator; a subject matter expert; any other teaching, coaching, or helping role. How do you interact differently when you remember you are in this position as “God’s servant” (v. 4)?

8. Considering v. 5, would people who've met you say that you are one who rebels against authority, one who follows the rules just to stay out of trouble (or at least doesn't get caught breaking the rules!), or one who is genuinely conscientious about developing good relationships with authorities? What does your attitude and response toward submission to authorities tell other people about the heart of a Christ follower?

9. Re-read v. 6-7. What do you owe? Taxes? Revenue? Respect? Honor? To whom do you owe these things? Where have you cut corners or tried to avoid paying what is owed? How can you make it right in the eyes of God? How will your submission to God in these matters help to produce a right response between you and God's servants—and ultimately, between you and God?

Takeaway: ACTS Prayer

Consider praying these words together as a group while you are gathered, and daily on your own before the Lord this week.
A = ADORATION: Father God, You alone are all-knowing, and You have appointed rulers as You've seen fit, to be Your servants and Your agents.
C = CONFESSION: Lord, I admit that I don't always view governing authorities with the respect or the honor due to those You've put in place.
T = THANKSGIVING: Thank You for the power and strength of Your Holy Spirit, Lord Jesus, to do what is right and to live without fear.
S = SUPPLICATION: Search my heart, O God; show me where I have struggled to give what I owe, and make me righteous in Your sight.

Notes/Prayer Requests

Big Thought

Submission in our vertical relationship (with God) teaches us how to love in our horizontal relationships (with people).

Icebreaker

For every “do not” in the Ten Commandments, what is one “do instead” you can think of, to show love for God and love for other people?

Encounter (Reflect)

1. In Romans 13:7, Paul instructs, “Give to everyone what you owe them.” Then, in v. 8, Paul goes on to say, “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another...” What is the connection between “what you owe” and the “debt to love”? How is love a debt we owe?

2. Why does Paul move from the topic of submission to governing authorities (v. 1-7) to the idea that love fulfills the law and sums up all commandments (v. 9)? What does submitting to authority have to do with loving your neighbor as yourself? (Think “vertical” relationship with God and “horizontal” relationships with the people around you.)

3. How is love “the fulfillment of the law,” according to v. 10? Thinking about v. 9, is biblical love more than just doing no harm to a neighbor—all the things God’s people “shall not” do? How so?

Grow (Engage)

4. Many people tend to speak of “love” as an emotion or sensation that we experience... and often exaggerate. We might say, “I love my spouse” and “I love french fries” with the same amount of enthusiasm! Considering Paul’s instruction about fulfilling “the law” (v. 8) by loving others, how does this passage challenge you to express love as an action or a way of life, instead of just a feeling? Why is love a “continuing” debt?

5. In your own words, explain how the imperative to “Love your neighbor as yourself” (v. 9) in the New Testament sums up all—all 613, to be exact!—commands found in the Old Testament. How does this one guideline, quoted here by Paul directly from Jesus’ teachings (Mark 12:28-34), tell us anything and everything we need to know about what to do or not to do in any given circumstance?

6. Read Mark 12:28-34, where we’re given an account of Jesus’ exchange with a teacher of the law, concerning the most important commandment of all. How is love “more important” than any other “offerings and sacrifices” you’ve seen yourself bringing to God, past or present? What needs to change in your life, based on this perspective?

Give (Apply)

7. To whom in your life do you owe a debt of love (Romans 13:8)? What will it take for you to settle all other “debt” you have outstanding? Are there wrongs to be righted, amends to be made, areas of forgiveness to be sought, relationships to be reconciled? When do you plan to give what you owe?

8. Who is your neighbor (v. 9)? Read Luke 10:25-37, which expands on Jesus' conversation with a teacher of the law, who inquired about this very thing. Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan illustrates for us the distinction between sins of commission (the things we do to one another) and sins of omission (the things we don't do for one another). Consider the "road" you travel in a day... are there people you've "passed by," whom you've loved—or cared for—less than yourself? What will you do about it?

9. Remember how Paul's instruction about the "debt to love" (Romans 13:8) immediately follows his discussion about submission to governing authorities (v. 1-7), ultimately meaning submission to *God's* authority. Think about any situations where it would be tempting to do "harm to a neighbor" (v. 10), either by commission or by omission. Would people around you say that submission to God's authority in these situations looks more like love, or more like obligation—a "want to," or a "have to"?

Takeaway: ACTS Prayer

Consider praying these words together as a group while you are gathered, and daily on your own before the Lord this week.

A = ADORATION: Heavenly Father, You are God, and You are love; Your law is a law of love, enacted for the wellbeing of Your beloved.

C = CONFESSION: Lord Jesus, I have fallen far short of Your submission to the Father's will, both in what I've done and what I've failed to do.

T = THANKSGIVING: I delight in the generosity You invite me into, that for every “do not” of Your Word, You provide a “do instead” in love.

S = SUPPLICATION: O God, open my eyes to my neighbor all around, that wherever love is owed, I may be a vessel of Your ever-flowing grace.

Notes/Prayer Requests

Big Thought

Seeing the signs of the times should create an urgency in following Jesus Christ.

Icebreaker

Have you ever slept through something important? How did you feel when you woke up and realized what happened?

Encounter (Reflect)

1. After emphasizing that readers of his letter are to love one another (v. 8-10), Paul urges them to “do this, understanding the present time” (v. 11). Based on your own knowledge so far, what can you describe about the “present time” Paul is referring to here? Where have you picked up this information along the way?

2. In v. 11-12, Paul makes several references to time, followed by resulting responses the early believers should exhibit (v. 12-14) when they understand what time it is. What are the implications of Paul’s statement, “The hour has already come for you to wake up”? What happens for those who are late?

3. If “the present time” (v. 11) Paul speaks of is somewhere between “night” and “day” (v. 12), where does that put today’s Church? What is the attitude or state of being Paul is calling people to, in this picture of waking from slumber?

Grow (Engage)

4. Read Matthew 24 and Jesus' words about the signs of the times, which point to the end of the age and the day of His return. What evidence do you see in the world, based on Jesus' words in Matthew and our own present time, that "our salvation is nearer now than when we [referring to Christians] first believed" (Romans 13:11)? What does this mean?

5. Go to Romans 1 and read v. 18-23, about the wrath of God, the wickedness of people, and knowledge about God being made plain to people who did not glorify God. In a current world where wars, famines, and false prophets seem to be everywhere, who do you think needs to "wake up" (13:11) to what is happening today? What signs are people sleeping through that God has made plain—that should have already brought us out of our slumber? (Remember, Paul's letter is written to believers in the early church, not non-believers outside the church.)

6. In this in-between time *after* the Resurrection and *before* the Return, what else might God be using to get people to "wake up"? Where does persecution fit into the timeline, and what should be our response? In other words, what is the purpose of all these signs of the times?

Give (Apply)

7. Remember that right before issuing this wake-up call for believers, Paul was just outlining our “continuing debt to love one another” (v. 8). How does your understanding of the present time—the time you yourself are in right now—spur you to “do this” (v. 11) and heed the command, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (v. 9)? Specifically, how does the urgency of the present time change your attitude and actions toward the people around you, including those who know Christ and those who don’t?

8. How do you engage with people who are bringing persecution against the Church? Think about workplaces, schools, or social circles you’re a part of. Considering a culture in which religious freedoms clash more and more with the governing authorities, how do you see yourself walking out Paul’s instruction about submitting to authorities (13:1), doing no harm to a neighbor (13:10), *and* being alert to signs of the times—including persecution—that drive you to share the gospel with more urgency than ever?

9. Notice again that Paul says it’s already past time “for *you* to wake up from your slumber”—“you” meaning the hearer or reader of this message, not some other person you wish would wake up! What has God been using in your life to bring *your* attention to the present time—a season of opportunity, a critical decision point, a period when He is making something available to you? Write out your prayer for His grace and power to step into a specific situation this week.

Takeaway: ACTS Prayer

Consider praying these words together as a group while you are gathered, and daily on your own before the Lord this week.

A = ADORATION: Dear Lord Jesus Christ, You are the light that drives out darkness—Savior and Redeemer of the world, worthy of all praise.

C = CONFESSION: Father God, at times I lose touch with the sense of urgency over what it means that, in reality, the Day is truly coming near.

T = THANKSGIVING: I'm so thankful that what looks like world chaos from my point of view is all held in Your timing and is no mystery to You.

S = SUPPLICATION: Holy Spirit, keep me alert to Your movement in all things, so I may bring kingdom perspective to the day and the time I'm in.

Notes/Prayer Requests

Big Thought

Christians live in a season of opportune time and critical decision points, when salvation in Christ is freely available.

Icebreaker

Have you ever let an opportunity pass you by, only to regret it later? What would you do differently if another opportunity came up?

Encounter (Reflect)

1. “And do this,” Paul says in Romans 13:11, referring back to love as “the fulfillment of the law” (v. 10)—exhibited by Christ followers submitting to governing authorities and loving our neighbors as ourselves. Believers are to “do this,” Paul lays out, in light of the urgency of “the present time.” Concerning the “present” time in which this letter was written, why was the imperative to love others becoming more critical for the believers in Rome?

2. In v. 12-13, Paul several times contrasts “night” and “day,” “darkness” and “light.” What is the “night” he’s referring to? What does he mean by the “day” to come? What are the recipients of this letter supposed to “wake up” (v. 11) *from*, and what are they waking up *to*?

3. From what you know about the time in which Paul wrote this letter, remembering he is speaking to a group of believers in an early church, why do you suppose there is a need to address expectations for decent behavior among Christians (v. 13)?

Grow (Engage)

4. If salvation was “nearer now” in the time of the Romans—if the hour had “already come” for these early believers to “wake up” (v. 11)—how then should this passage of the Word be interpreted today? How does the urgency of our time, long after the Romans, amplify the importance of Paul’s previous instruction to love one another (v. 8)? Do you think Christians today take the timing more seriously than those in Paul’s day?

5. Consider how Paul appeals to the Romans to “put *aside* the deeds of darkness” and, instead, “put *on* the armor of light” (v. 12). How is putting something *aside* different from putting something *on*? What’s challenging about the idea of darkness as something we *do* and the idea of light as something we *wear*?

6. Have you ever tried to quit a bad habit—and found the harder you tried not to think about it, the harder it was not to think about it? Much research and human experience has shown that the way to change a behavior is more than just not *doing something*, but rather replacing that behavior by *doing something else instead*. Read v. 14 and consider an area where your thought life needs to be renewed by God. What disciplines can you build in, to remind your mind of the Lord Jesus Christ rather than the desires of the flesh?

Give (Apply)

7. In what areas of your life is it past time to “wake up” (v. 11) to the continuing debt of love owed to people around you? Are there relationships in your life—yes, specifically even in the church!—that have suffered from selfishness instead of experiencing love? Write down the names that come to mind and your part in the matter. Now, what is the debt of love that you owe? Be specific. What will you do about it?

8. In v. 13, Paul lists several behaviors that do nothing to show the love of God for people around us. How does being clothed with the Lord Jesus Christ result in a different outward appearance, compared to thinking about how to gratify the desires of the flesh (v. 14)? How would others say Jesus “looks” on you? Where do you see room for growth?

9. In these verses, Paul is speaking to his fellow believers, addressing a collective “us” (v. 12, 13)—including himself in the mix—in his invitation to put aside darkness and put on Jesus Christ. Learning to love one another is a communal process... nobody does it perfectly, and we’re not meant to walk this Christian road alone! Who can you invite into a mentoring relationship or an accountability team, to encourage each other and spur one another on to good deeds?

Takeaway: ACTS Prayer

Consider praying these words together as a group while you are gathered, and daily on your own before the Lord this week.

A = ADORATION: O God, by Your Word and Your creation, You have made all I need known to me: Your awesome plan, purpose, and presence!

C = CONFESSION: Lord, You know my heart and how prone I am to fall into considering my desires of the flesh rather than the things of heaven.

T = THANKSGIVING: Thank You, King Jesus, from the bottom of my heart, that by Your mercy I may be clothed in Your strength and salvation!

S = SUPPLICATION: Please, God, bring me into Your light and do away with the deeds of darkness affecting my life, church, and community.

Notes/Prayer Requests

Big Thought

When followers of Jesus demonstrate a unity and love for each other that rises above differences, it is a witness to Christ changing lives.

Icebreaker

In what ways have you seen small arguments turn into major issues within a group of people—especially a family? What was the result?

Encounter (Reflect)

1. What is the first order of business Paul addresses, after bringing attention to the signs of the times? “Accept the one whose faith is weak,” he writes, “without quarreling over disputable matters” (14:1). Disputable matters are those issues of life that do not come with a clear biblical mandate: food choices, styles of dress, sacred days, alcohol consumption, music preferences, etc. This instruction comes immediately after Paul’s urging to “clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh” (13.14). How is quarreling a form of gratifying the desires of the flesh? How is accepting “the one whose faith is weak” a way of being clothed with Christ? Why is this such a critical matter right after Paul has expressed the urgency of the times?

2. Consider the two opposing types addressed in Paul’s letter to the Roman church. In v. 2, there’s the one whose faith allows them to “eat anything”—who doesn’t have a problem eating meat sacrificed to idols, knowing idols don’t matter. Then there’s the one who “eats only vegetables”—who believes it is sacrilegious to eat meat used in pagan rituals of worship. There’s one or the other, each holding to strong convictions about right and wrong. What examples of opposing groups can you think of in the Church today? What do Paul’s words about contempt and judgment bring to mind?

3. In v. 1-3, Paul discusses two groups of believers based on the strength or weakness of their faith. In v. 4, Paul refers to servants of different masters. Who are the servants he's picturing here? Who are the masters? What does this have to do with judging someone else's faith?

Grow (Engage)

4. Throughout Romans 14, Paul goes on to detail a lengthy teaching on the topic of quarreling, contempt, and judgment among Christians. Why can't we all just get along? Maybe we need to be asking why we *should* get along in the first place. When followers of Jesus demonstrate a love and unity that rises above differences, the world sees a strong witness to Christ changing lives. Read John 13:34-35. How have your church experiences reflected this desire of Christ's heart?

5. Why is eating meat or not eating meat such a divisive issue in Paul's context? (Hint: Consult study Bible notes or a commentary for some historical/cultural background.) To those offended by each other's eating habits, Paul challenges, "Who are you to judge someone else's servant?" (v. 4). Who is the "someone else" Paul is referring to here? What does this imply about the role believers assign to themselves in other people's lives, when they judge one another? Where do you see yourself in this picture?

6. In v. 4, Paul challenges believers for judging each other, suggesting everyone must answer to their own God. The kicker for these two opposing groups is that there is only one God—“And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.” If God will uphold us regardless of individual convictions, why do our choices in these matters *matter*?

Give (Apply)

7. According to the *Life Application Study Bible*, “A person’s faith is weak in an area if that individual must avoid certain activities, people, or places in order to protect his or her spiritual life.” What are some areas of temptation, weakness, or harm that have been dangerous or damaging for your growth in faith? Are there other people you can encourage or ask to keep you accountable in such areas, asking God to strengthen you *and* them in faith?

8. Acceptance is a concept that comes with many different interpretations these days. Many will say, “You just need to accept me the way I am!”—thinking acceptance of the person means agreement with the person’s behaviors. In v. 1, Paul instructs the Roman church to “accept the one whose faith is weak,” and in v. 3, he states the Church is to do this “for God has accepted them.” How is the Word’s view of acceptance different from the world’s view of acceptance?

9. What are some “disputable matters” (v. 1) you’ve encountered recently? How have you contributed to such topics? Have conversations on these matters served to point people toward Jesus, or toward personal causes? If someone new to church overheard your discussions with other believers (in the main lobby before or after a worship service,

for example), what would they say matters most to you? What are the non-disputable matters we should be focused on, as Christ followers? What does it mean to “stand or fall” (v. 4)?

Takeaway: ACTS Prayer

Consider praying these words together as a group while you are gathered, and daily on your own before the Lord this week.

A = ADORATION: Lord, You are able to keep Your servants standing, even under misguided judgment or contempt from others, believers or not.

C = CONFESSION: God, it is so easy to get pulled into secondary quarrels over disputable matters, and lose sight of our unity in Christ.

T = THANKSGIVING: Thank You, Father, for accepting me as Your child, and for Your Holy Spirit’s specific, personal conviction in my life.

S = SUPPLICATION: Lord Jesus Christ, teach me in Your ways, so I may rise above differences and gladly welcome others into the family of God.

Notes/Prayer Requests

Big Thought

When it comes to disputable matters, be convinced of your views—doing all that you do to please the Lord—and be considerate of those with different views.

Icebreaker

Has anyone in your life ever made a personal choice that unexpectedly affected you? What was that like?

Encounter (Reflect)

1. Consider the gifts of grace outlined in Romans 12: gifts of prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, and showing mercy (v. 6-8). Think through each spiritual gifting and how a person gifted in that way might respond when confronted with “disputable matters” in the church—such as which days a person holds sacred, or which foods they’re convinced to eat or not eat (14:5-6). How might someone respond contemptuously to differences? How might someone respond graciously?

2. What is the common purpose or central concern Paul points to in v. 7-9? What are Christians living for, as followers of Christ? What should Christians be willing to die for—or die *to*—for the sake of others?

3. Considering v. 10-12, what is it that levels the playing field among followers of Christ? In what ways does this call out sin and hypocrisy from the hearts of believers? How is this central matter intended to redirect the focus of believers to what really matters?

Grow (Engage)

4. Depending on spiritual giftings, personality styles, and other factors, such as racial or socioeconomic differences, family backgrounds, and cultural norms (including church cultures), we all tend to bring strong convictions about what's important in our lives of faith. What do you find challenging about being "fully convinced" (v. 5) in your own mind, without seeing other Christians or other denominations as wrong or inferior for adhering to different practices?

5. In v. 6, Paul suggests that spiritual disciplines such as observing holy days and eating or abstaining from certain foods can be honoring to God, when done in a spirit of thanksgiving. What practices or disciplines might God be inviting you into, as a means of grace to grow you in your faith, character, and reliance upon Christ? Are there areas in your life where you need to become fully convinced you are living in a way that honors God?

6. What are some practices you currently adhere to, in your life of faith, that are honoring or pleasing to God? Or, what are some areas where you sense God prompting you to make a change? How do spiritual practices bring you into closer awareness of God's character and presence? How would you explain to someone that this is important for you without making it a "rule" for all Christians?

Give (Apply)

7. What are some different views, traditions, or practices that can become divisive in the body of Christ? How have you observed judgment or contempt (v. 10) getting in the way of unity among believers? Based on what you know, from the gospel accounts, about Jesus' way of ministering across the dividing lines, what is one area or relationship where God might be asking you to welcome in a brother or sister who sees differently than you do? How can you demonstrate to this person that you are considerate of their Christian views?

8. When we focus on the outer behaviors of others, we can easily lose sight of the inner condition of our own heart. Knowing "we will all stand before God's judgment seat" (v. 10), Paul points out, "So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God" (v. 12). How does building spiritual accountability in your own life keep you humble and accepting of others who are at different places in their faith? Who are you inviting to be a part of your accountability team?

9. If you're considering a change in your life as unto the Lord, what is the realistic impact this choice will have on the people around you? How do your actions affect others? Will anyone who cares about you be confused? offended? inconvenienced? turned off? Will a sacrifice on your part force an unwanted change on someone else's part? What kind of witness are you presenting? Pray through your motives and make it your plea that God will use your humble and contrite heart to spur others on, in turn, to examine their own ways before the Lord—so we all may be of one mind in one Spirit, known as His disciples by our love.

Takeaway: ACTS Prayer

Consider praying these words together as a group while you are gathered, and daily on your own before the Lord this week.

A = ADORATION: Lord God Almighty, I know in the end, every knee will bow before You, and every tongue will acknowledge You as God!

C = CONFESSION: Father, I admit I fall into judging my brothers and sisters, imposing my will on their lives instead of asking for Your will.

T = THANKSGIVING: Thank You, Christ Jesus, for Your sacrifice on my behalf, that I may belong to the One Who died and returned to life for me.

S = SUPPLICATION: God, let me be fully convinced in my own mind that what I do, I do in thanks to You, and keep me considerate of others.

Notes/Prayer Requests

Big Thought

We are to place a high value on the community of believers and how our actions can affect the faith of others in this community.

Icebreaker

Have you ever accidentally tripped someone? What happened? How did it make you feel?

Encounter (Reflect)

1. As Paul outlines in Romans 14:12, each believer will be held to account for their own life. Because of this, he says, believers should stop judging one another and instead pay attention to their own actions—and how they affect other believers in the church. In 14:13, Paul moves from the idea of welcoming those who hold different convictions, to the concept of ensuring that believers who consider themselves “strong” don’t cause spiritual problems for those who are “weaker” in faith. What are some types of “stumbling block” or “obstacle” you can think of that might cause someone to fall?

2. How would Paul’s original audience, including Jewish and Gentile converts to Christianity, understand his references to something being “unclean” (v. 14)? Who are these references directed toward? (Try consulting study Bible notes or a commentary for further insight.) How does the idea of what could be considered “unclean” translate into our time or language today? In other words, what are a few things different Christians might consider to be off limits?

3. The kingdom of God, Paul writes, is a matter of “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (v. 17), indicating this is a way of serving Christ which is “pleasing to God and receives human approval” (v. 18). How have you seen this truth in the Church—past or present?

Grow (Engage)

4. Especially in our modern American culture, many people tend to insist on personal “freedoms” and personal “rights”—often at the expense of the freedoms and rights of others. A “stumbling block” implies tripping someone up by accident, perhaps being unaware or inconsiderate, where an “obstacle” implies an action that is intentional, impeding someone’s progress on purpose. How do you see these dynamics playing out in today’s society? How does v. 13-15 challenge you to make countercultural choices? Be specific, thinking through current or recent scenarios you’ve encountered.

5. In v. 14-15, Paul walks through an examination of liberty vs. responsibility concerning disputable matters within the Roman church. Knowing the congregation was made up of Jewish and Gentile converts to Christianity, who brought very different views of acceptable diets and appropriate worship, how does this shape your perspective on people today of different denominations, or those with little past exposure to church life?

6. In today’s society, how do you see matters of “eating and drinking” (v. 17) serving to divide people over opinions or personal preferences? Are there areas in your life where your choices have been distressing or divisive to anyone? Have you ever cared more about having your way than

about understanding others' choices? Write a prayer for God to search your heart in these matters, and give Him space to speak to you about them.

Give (Apply)

7. Rather than judging others, Paul urges us to be mindful “not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister” (v. 13). In one respect, we are only responsible for ourselves, and in another, we are responsible for each other. How have you been a helpful example to those who’ve observed your way of life? Are your actions drawing people closer to Christ, or pushing them away from Christ? What needs to change?

8. Christlike love wants what is best for the wellbeing of another. How does Paul’s admonishment about “acting in love” (v. 15) reframe situations and relationships where you feel your freedoms or rights are imposed upon? Would someone struggling with weakness or temptation see your actions as caring or as selfish, considering their context or point of view?

9. We probably all, at some point, encounter individuals or institutions that feel they need to put unnecessary restrictions on *our* behaviors, based on *their* deeply held convictions. (But we’re not judging here!) Paul isn’t talking about forcing extra “rules” on us—that’s called legalism. Jesus spoke sharply against making up human traditions that turn wor-

ship into a burden to control people's lives. With "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (v. 17), then, where might you need to develop healthy boundaries that allow you to see beyond the moment, so you can interact lovingly with people who see differently than you do? How will that change these relationships?

Takeaway: ACTS Prayer

Consider praying these words together as a group while you are gathered, and daily on your own before the Lord this week.

A = ADORATION: God, I praise You for Your goodness and grace in revealing a kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

C = CONFESSION: Lord Jesus Christ, I know I certainly haven't valued my brothers and sisters the way You have, in giving Your life for them!

T = THANKSGIVING: Holy Spirit, thank You for helping me recognize when to set aside preferences in favor of building up my faith community.

S = SUPPLICATION: O Lord, show me the eternal ramifications of my actions; grow me in self-awareness, to be a benefit to the faith of others.

Notes/Prayer Request

Big Thought

See beyond minor issues and make every effort to bless others.

Icebreaker

Have you ever met someone who always seemed to put others before themselves? What effect did they have on your life?

Encounter (Reflect)

1. “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification,” Paul writes (Romans 14:19). Go back and re-read Romans 13 through this verse—from submission to authority, to giving what is owed, to loving one another, to getting along in the church, to placing no stumbling block or obstacle before one another. How do Paul’s teachings build up to this point in v. 19? How does this instruction move a step beyond simply not being a problem for other believers, into being a blessing to other believers?

2. Read 14:20-21. How do these verses relate back to what is written in 13:13-14? How does one’s inner relationship with Christ affect one’s outer witness for Christ?

3. “But whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat,” Paul writes (v. 23). What kind of scenario might describe what Paul is picturing here? Can you think of examples where someone might have doubts about whether an action is right or wrong, honoring or dishonoring to God, and does it anyway? What does Paul mean by saying such a one is “condemned”?

Grow (Engage)

4. What kind of efforts lead “to peace and to mutual edification” (v. 19) in the body of Christ? What’s the difference between just going along with the crowd vs. intentionally making a point to let go of quarrels over disputable matters? How might walking in these ways influence your relationships outside the church as well?

5. Paul urges that regardless of personal convictions over food or drink or sacred days, they should be kept “between yourself and God” (v. 22). Practically speaking, as believers in Christ, our daily practices will often draw attention or interest from others (Christians *and* non-Christians). How have you tended to explain your choices in the past? What is this passage telling you about recognizing a time to speak and a time to be quiet? What are the truths of God’s Word that help bring direction to the course of action you’re choosing?

6. What does Paul mean in his observations about condemning oneself by what one approves, or being condemned by what one eats (v. 22-23)? Where does this sense of condemnation come from? Have you ever found yourself condemning yourself, or feeling condemned by others, over something you’ve done (or not done)? What does God say about this?

Give (Apply)

7. When we make it our intent “to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification” (v. 19), this doesn’t mean we can never voice our disagreement or express concern about a brother’s or sister’s choices. In fact, challenging someone’s assumptions can often be a form of blessing in itself. Rather, Paul is urging us to focus our energy on kingdom matters, instead of making every little matter into a big issue that distracts from true issues of the faith. With this perspective, what are some barriers or uncertainties that have prevented you from welcoming others into the fellowship of believers? How will you approach these matters differently from now on?

8. “Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food,” Paul urges (v. 20). If there are matters that are “clean” to you but “unclean” to another person, what personal adjustments or adaptations can you make in your life, in order to honor both God and that person with your choices? Practically speaking, how can you keep this matter “between yourself and God” (v. 22) without making it an issue for someone else?

9. Re-read all of Romans 14 once more. What has been most convincing or convicting for you as you read this Scripture? What is God bringing to your mind about the ways you interact with, talk about, or think of other Christians? What are you going to do about it, starting this week? today? right this moment, while it’s already on your heart? How can you actively step beyond the simply non-destructive or neutral, into the necessary building up of others in faith?

Takeaway: ACTS Prayer

Consider praying these words together as a group while you are gathered, and daily on your own before the Lord this week.

A = ADORATION: God, You know my heart; You know what's done in secret, and You notice sacrifices this world will never see or understand.

C = CONFESSION: I realize when it comes right down to it, I can be really selfish and thoughtless about the things I think are best.

T = THANKSGIVING: Lord Jesus Christ, I rejoice that You've given me a way—far beyond my power!—to live in peace and mutual edification.

S = SUPPLICATION: I need Your help, Holy Spirit, to focus on what really matters and to be a blessing to the people You put in my path.

Notes/Prayer Requests

Big Thought

A strong church is filled with followers of Jesus who are others-oriented.

Icebreaker

Have you ever been in a situation where you had to pick up some slack for someone? How was your attitude about this?

Encounter (Reflect)

1. What does it really mean to support one another in the body of Christ? In previous verses, Paul has referred to specific tension between believers based on what they choose to eat or not eat, depending on different contextual views about what is appropriate or not appropriate. But in 14:23, Paul broadens the conversation from “eating” to “everything.” What are some other areas where believers might have doubts about their choices or course of action?

2. What are the essentials for a strong, effective church? “We who are strong,” Paul writes, “ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves” (15:1). Who is Paul referring to among the “we” (including himself) “who are strong”? What does it mean to “bear with” others in their weaknesses? How do you think someone could do this insincerely, to “please” (or benefit) themselves rather than build up a neighbor (v. 2)?

3. Re-read v. 3-6, then deeply consider the two “so that” statements found in v. 4 and v. 6. What are the purposes Paul is calling the Roman believers toward in his instruction to this church? Who is the “we” refer-

enced in v. 4? Who is the “you” referenced in v. 6? How do the “endurance” and “encouragement” mentioned in both v. 4 and v. 6 extend to today’s reading of this Scripture? How does hope create a strong church?

Grow (Engage)

4. Carefully, prayerfully consider Paul’s words about “everything that does not come from faith” (v. 23). What are you eating and drinking? What are you putting in your body? How about your mind? What kind of media or content are you consuming? Where are these inputs coming from? How are your patterns of work, rest, and worship? Are you making time to engage with God through the practice of spiritual disciplines? Are you allowing any influences other than your faith to decide what activities or habits come into your life? Write out a brief confession (statement of truth) to God about these things.

5. Read Philippians 2:3-4. Many of us tend to struggle with personal boundaries, peer pressure, people-pleasing tendencies, or seeking approval from others, instead of living in ways that are honoring to God. What’s the difference between people-pleasing and Paul’s instruction that “Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up” (Romans 15:2)? How does this challenge the priorities, loyalties, or insecurities in your life?

6. Paul writes that endurance is taught in the Scriptures, and that encouragement is provided there (v. 4). In his blessing to the Roman church, he also affirms it is God Who gives endurance and encouragement (v. 5). Why are these necessary for bearing with others and building others up, as people who serve God and serve one another in Christ?

Where do you turn for endurance? Who do you seek out for encouragement? How is God giving these to you through His Word, through the community of believers, and through your time with Him in prayer and service?

Give (Apply)

7. Re-read v. 1-3. Write these verses into a prayer asking God to help you in these areas. If an attitude or action toward others, on your part, does not align with this teaching for believers, how will you allow God’s Word to change your heart? If a Christian brother or sister encourages legalism or leniency in an area that troubles you, how will you respond?

8. What is the “same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had” (v. 5)? How does this speak to the attitude of mind you have toward actual people in your actual life? Put another way, how do your interactions reflect the unity of the Church as God intends? Describe specific examples (positive or negative). Are there relationships where you need to learn how to “bear with” others more? Are there relationships where others have been bearing with *you*?

9. Think back through the types of disputable matters that can contribute to disunity in the Church. Where are you in need of spiritual accountability in these areas? Who can help speak endurance and encouragement into your life? Where does God have you positioned as a part of His work in the life of another? As far as it depends on you, what needs to change, “so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father

of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 6) in your relationships with other believers?

Takeaway: ACTS Prayer

Consider praying these words together as a group while you are gathered, and daily on your own before the Lord this week.

A = ADORATION: O God, You alone have shown the way and made it possible to bear with one another in perfect love, as the body of Christ.

C = CONFESSION: On my own, God, I simply don't experience the endurance or encouragement to keep the attitude of Christ toward others.

T = THANKSGIVING: Thank You, Lord Jesus, for taking on all insults against me, so I may submit to You, learn from You, and have hope!

S = SUPPLICATION: God, please pour out the strength of Your Holy Spirit on my church, so with one mind and one voice we may glorify You!

Notes/Prayer Requests

Big Thought

It has been God's intention all along to unite all people under Jesus Christ.

Icebreaker

Have you ever been a part of a team that worked well together? How about a team that *didn't* work well together? Describe these experiences.

Encounter (Reflect)

1. Paul begins Romans 15 in teaching mode, continuing his instruction for believers of this church in the efforts they're to make to get along with each other. Then, in 15:5, Paul suddenly shifts into prayer, appealing to "the God who gives endurance and encouragement" to live out this instruction. What does this imply about the believers' ability to do what is asked of them?

2. How does accepting one another, as believers, "bring praise to God" (v. 7)? What are "the promises made to the patriarchs" (v. 8) that Paul speaks of here? How might the word "moreover" in v. 9 correct the original audience's understanding about God's relational goal for His Church?

3. For Paul's original audience, what is the significance of his emphasis on the Gentiles in v. 9, 10, 11, and 12? Why does Paul get so repetitive about this point? What is the significance of this emphasis for the Church of today? And how do these verses relate back to v. 7?

Grow (Engage)

4. “Accept one another, then,” Paul writes, “just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (v. 7). In many respects, our culture might stop reading this Scripture after the words, “Accept one another.” How do the connected phrases—“just as Christ accepted you” and “in order to bring praise to God”—provide the method (how) and purpose (why) that define a Christian view of what acceptance means? How does this affect your understanding of unity in the body of Christ?

5. Reflecting on the complexities of accepting one another, consider v. 8-9. How can there be unity in the Church when there are so many people coming from so many different backgrounds, doctrines, perspectives, and personal experiences that pull against each other? What is most challenging, for you, about finding unity in Christ? What has been most encouraging for you in this?

6. Re-read Romans 15:5-9 and carefully examine the number of times Paul points to Jesus Christ as the example of how (v. 5, 7) and the reason for why (v. 8-9) we are to live in unity with one another, as brothers and sisters in faith. Have you seen groups of people uniting under someone or something else, other than Christ? What tends to happen to these groups over time? Have certain figures, institutions, causes, or movements been helpful for building people up in faith? Have you been a “follower” of any preacher, teacher, leader, party, or affiliation that you identified with? How has this complicated matters of walking in your faith?

Give (Apply)

7. Think of examples you've observed, recently or historically, when Christians have served "with one mind and one voice" (v. 6) to glorify God through unity in Christ. What did those Christians do that seemed impossible to you? Where do you need God's "endurance and encouragement" (v. 5) to engage differently with people around you, to bring glory to His name?

8. The world notices when followers of Jesus, with different backgrounds and struggles, practice Christlike acceptance—and this brings praise to God. Practically speaking, what needs to happen in your life to "glorify God for His mercy" (v. 9)? Is there a matter where you need to repent, forgive, bear with, endure, encourage, or hope, for the good of others and for unity in the body of Christ? Write out your confession (statement of truth) about these matters and ask God for His power and mercy to transform you in the relationships involved.

9. Read v. 9-12 again. What do these verses have to do with God's plan for unity? Who are the Gentiles of today's world? How should these Scriptures affect your witness among others, inside or outside the Church? (Hint: Examine these verses for the verbs, or action words, that you can apply within your circle of influence.)

Takeaway: ACTS Prayer

Consider praying these words together as a group while you are gathered, and daily on your own before the Lord this week.

A = ADORATION: Lord, my heart sings in praise for Your plan and purpose, Your promises and Your mercy, that all may know Your name!

C = CONFESSION: If I'm honest, God, I'd have to say the unity of believers has probably been the least of my priorities in faith so far.

T = THANKSGIVING: I'm reminded now of the amazing truth of Your promises fulfilled, that a Gentile like me could even know You as Lord!

S = SUPPLICATION: Holy Spirit, open my heart and my life to accept all others in unity under Jesus Christ, so all I do serves to glorify You, God.

Notes/Prayer Requests

Big Thought

True hope is experienced within a true understanding of Jesus.

Icebreaker

Particularly as our nation has worked through many ups and downs of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, where have you seen signs of hope?

Encounter (Reflect)

1. Reminding the Roman church of Scriptures foretelling praise among the Gentiles as God's plan of salvation unfolds, Paul quotes the prophet Isaiah by stating, "in Him [God] the Gentiles will hope" (15:12). From here, Paul shifts immediately into speaking blessings over those who would hear this letter read aloud, asking, "May the God of hope fill *you* with all joy and peace... so that you may overflow with hope..." (15:13). Again, who is the "you" Paul is addressing here? What is the connection between the Gentiles spoken of through the prophets and the people Paul is praying for in his present time?

2. Considering everything Paul has written in Romans 13-15 up to this point, what is significant about his prayer for this early church to be filled with "all joy and peace" and to "overflow with hope"? Go back and re-read the previous chapters, considering how joy, peace, and hope relate to carrying out every instruction Paul has given these believers so far. Why do you think Paul adds "by the power of the Holy Spirit" at the end of v. 13?

3. Read the rest of Romans 15:14-33. Consider Paul's quote from the prophet Isaiah—"Those who were not told about Him will see, and those who have not heard will understand" (v. 21). How does this seeing and understanding about Jesus bring the hope Paul speaks of in v. 13? What responsibility does Paul carry for "those who were not told" and "those who have not heard"? How does telling and hearing about Jesus bring people to true hope?

Grow (Engage)

4. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace *as you trust in Him,*" Paul writes. What must happen in order to be filled with joy and peace? Why does this feel so backward from a human perspective? Consider your experiences with trust. How has trusting other people shaped your willingness or readiness to trust in God? What challenges do you have to overcome in this area?

5. Where in this world have you seen misplaced hope that leads to hopelessness? Consider the understanding "that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (v. 13). What's missing from worldly perspectives about where hope can be found? What has held you back from experiencing an overflowing of hope? Write out a prayer asking for the power of the Holy Spirit in the specific situations or relationships where hope is needed in your life.

6. Many of us have allowed confusion, convenience, or conflict to produce assumptions about who Jesus is, what He has done, and why He matters. It's easy to go through life on auto-pilot, without taking time to ask the critical self-examination questions that help us realize where

we truly need the God of hope. What does it mean for you to be “in the know” about Jesus? How will you grow in your understanding of Him in days, weeks, and months ahead? What disciplines, practices, rhythms, or areas of learning will you commit to, as a means of seeking Christ more and more?

Give (Apply)

7. Throughout all of Scripture and human history, we can see a tendency to turn toward money, possessions, territory, political allies, personal relationships, fitness/health, and control as sources of hope. But all things belong to God, and He uses all things for His purposes. Remembering this, what has God given to you to steward? How will your stewardship of these things serve to build others up (15:2), glorify God for His mercy (15:9), and point people to the God of hope (15:13)?

8. Chapters 13-15 of Paul’s letter to the Roman church address followers of Jesus Christ. Written to specific believers in a specific time and place, this letter carries timeless truths, principles, and instructions about the ways we Christians get along with governing authorities and the ways we get along with each other. Living in true hope means submitting to the authority of God, recognizing your identity in Christ, and honoring the image of God in your brothers and sisters—who, like you, are being remade in the likeness of Christ. How will all of this change your attitudes and actions to do right by others in your family of faith?

9. Where in your life do you see areas of confusion, convenience, or conflict that make it challenging to bring praise to the God of hope in your relationships with other people? Imagine what it would look like for you

to interact with these people as one filled with joy and peace, overflowing with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. What needs to change for that picture to become reality? Be specific, trusting in the God of hope Who has given you the command, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Romans 13:9).

Takeaway: ACTS Prayer

Consider praying these words together as a group while you are gathered, and daily on your own before the Lord this week.

A = ADORATION: Heavenly Father, You alone are able to fill me with all joy and peace, enjoying Your truth as I trust in You more and more.

C = CONFESSION: God, You know my heart and the ways I’ve been hurt—You know how hard it is for me to trust and to hope in some cases.

T = THANKSGIVING: I give thanks, Lord Jesus Christ, that through You and the power of Your Holy Spirit, I can trust in the God of hope!

S = SUPPLICATION: O Lord, let us become people who love one another and bear with one another in unity through hope in Jesus Christ. Amen!

Notes/Prayer Requests

WHAT'S NEXT?

We hope this discipleship guide has been an encouragement to you in your faith and your walk alongside others in the name of Jesus Christ.

If you'd like to speak with someone about more ways to learn, connect, serve, or lead in the local church, please call the GracePoint office at 605-692-6671, or email communitylife@gracepointwesleyan.org.

Grace and peace be with you,
GracePoint Staff

APPENDIX

GUIDANCE FOR GROUPS

Becoming a growth group leader shouldn't seem like an intimidating responsibility, but it can feel overwhelming without clear expectations. So here are some guidelines to help understand what you're getting into!

Preparation: Growth group leaders are expected to devote regular time to prepare for their group each week. Preparation includes reading Scripture, gathering related materials, and reviewing notes for group discussion. This can take an hour or two each week, and should ideally happen before the day your group meets (not at the last minute). This is important for your group's experience as well as your own continued growth as a leader.

Prayer: Group leaders are encouraged to come prepped and "prayed up." Ideally, plan to arrive 15-30 minutes early. Spend this time in prayer for your group as a whole, for individual situations within the group, and for the week's lesson to connect people to God. This is a time to reflect on the purpose of GracePoint growth groups: *discipleship*. Ask God to move in people's lives before anyone even comes through the door.

Meeting: This is the main responsibility of leading a growth group. Leaders are expected to be present for their group meeting times, according to the group's schedule. Weekly meetings usually last about an hour. If your group runs longer, you are responsible for communicating expectations with your participants. IF you are unavailable for a certain week, you're advised not to cancel. Instead, ask someone in your group to fill in for you while you're gone. This is an equipping/empowering opportunity to encourage a participant to step up and serve as a leader.

Communication: You are encouraged to communicate consistently with your group throughout the week, to stay in touch and keep everyone in the loop. Group emails/texts are helpful for sharing information, preventing confusion, and building a sense of community. As a group leader, you also have the opportunity to connect with people individually, going deeper in conversation and helping participants grow.

Attendance: For admin purposes, group leaders are asked to track and submit attendance each week, whether meeting at GracePoint or off-site.

TIPS FOR DISCUSSION

Lead & Listen: Set the direction, but don't dominate the conversation. Create intentional space for others to offer ideas, observations, or questions. Follow the 80-20 model—leaders talk for 20% of the time and allow the group to talk for 80%.

Ask Good Questions: Don't kill your chances of discussion by asking yes/no questions. Keep your inquiries open-ended. Ask why/how/what questions that require thoughtful answers and spark additional questions.

Embrace the Awkward: Resist the temptation to fill the silence. If you really want engagement and discussion, be willing to wait for the input of others. If you want to break the ice, try saying, "Hey, I'm okay with awkward silences—I'm not afraid to wait." Chances are, participants will laugh, and then they'll speak up!

Embrace Diversity: Don't be afraid of differing opinions. Allow for the minority voice to be heard. This isn't always easy, but it's important for the culture of openness in your group. Listen to the opposing side of the argument. If you shut down that voice and show disrespect for opinions or experiences, you'll undercut the opportunity for honest expression. Create a safe place for people to process through disagreement or doubt.

Speak Boldly: Embracing diversity is not the same as endorsing every belief as equal truth. As a group leader, you will need to speak boldly at times, correcting misguided interpretations, representing the views of Scripture, or even speaking on behalf of your church. This doesn't mean you need to have all the answers—it might actually mean boldly acknowledging that you *don't* know the best answer, and letting your group know you'll look into the subject for further discussion next time.

Practice Discernment: Need wisdom? Ask God for it! The Holy Spirit will give you discernment and guidance, and He will show you how to speak the truth in love. He will let you know when to correct and when to just listen. He will help you. Trust where He leads you.

(Adapted from *Awakening Grace: How to Lead a Small Group* by Matt LeRoy and Jeremy Summers)

FOR FURTHER STUDY

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