

Hello Friends.

There are a few things that I am hoping to keep in mind as we continue into the Fall.

First, to continue to be relational. For me, this requires me to listen well, ask good questions, be vulnerable, and building relationships beyond group time.

Second, I want to be praying for God to build into people, raise up people who will serve God, and consider who might be ready to partner in leading a group or even branching.

Romans 9 has been a challenging start to stay on the main thing, be clear, and focus on application. Some aspects are clear, some are not. Please be sure to read ahead and prepare how you can focus on application.

As we have been doing for a few weeks, there are two parts to the HG notes: "Your time" and "Group time." In the first segment, I have tried to give a brief overview. Can you believe that it took me 20-30 hours to summarize this chapter! The first summary I wrote was 4-5 pages long. So, instead, I focused on four "tensions" facing these early disciples and Paul's response to those tensions. I hope it is helpful.

For the "Group time," try to stay focused on the application and avoid some of the theological sticky wickets. Let me know if you would like to read or listen to some of the multiple views. Please avoid promoting one side.

Here are my suggestions for facilitating this week. Praying for you, Steve

GROUP TIME: DISCUSSION OF APPLICATION FROM GOD'S WORD

SHARE A STORY

Here's mine. Diane and I just took a vacation to visit the location of our first date – the Santa Cruz boardwalk. We were surprised that it was so pristine – very clean, beautifully painted, and well appointed. But it was closed! Everything was right but one thing – it was not functioning as amusement park.

ASK: Have you ever had something similar happen – where something was very different than you thought?

MY STORY / YOUR STORY.

Perhaps share a story here of being alarmed or sorrowful to discover something.

FOR EXAMPLE, I can also remember a time when I was adrift in my heart. I was thinking about my own disappointments, focused on myself, and drifting far from God. I was a shepherd who wasn't shepherding, a disciple who wasn't following Jesus. I wasn't who people thought I was. When I realized the truth, I was alarmed.

You might want to SHARE your own story.

ASK: Has there been a time when you felt like you weren't who you should be or wanted to be? Was it alarming? Sad? What changed? What helped?

PRESENT: This week we are discussing Romans 9. The author, Paul, is **sorrowful and alarmed** and wants his friends in Christ to realize the truth about these matters.

READ: Let' read together Chapter nine. As we do, **notice the tensions** that Paul addresses and **how he answers them**.

ASK: Did you have the chance to read through the **summary of chapter nine**? Did you get to hear the message on Sunday?

Would it be helpful to read through the summary together?

A summary of chapter nine. The early church was composed of both Jews and non-Jews (gentiles). They wrestled with the following tensions that Paul addresses in chapters 9-11.

- **First**, Paul is deeply sorrowful because most of his fellow Jews rejected Jesus the Messiah and are "cut off from Christ." (1-3) But, God promised salvation to Israel. So, what happened? Did God's word fail? (6)
- **Second**, God was originally working in and through the Jewish people. He called them, made a covenant with them, gave them the law, temple worship, and promised Israel salvation. And then, the Messiah eventually came through their ancestry ("seed"). Aren't all Jews Abraham's children and therefore saved from God's wrath? (6-13)
- **Third**, sometimes God chose to show unearned mercy to Israel and sometimes he hardened the hard-hearted. How can He still find fault in people? (14-23)
- **Fourth**, why were gentiles included as God's "people" when they weren't the ones who "pursued righteousness?" Is it just (fair) that the Gentiles, who were not God's original "people," have obtained righteousness, while the Jews who were given the Law did not attain righteousness? (24-33)

God's answers:

First, God did promise to save Israel, but who is Israel? "^{But} it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel" (v.6). (Paul will follow this theme.) Notice that: "the children of the promise are counted as offspring," (8) and "'Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved" (27). So, yes, God did promise to save Israel, but this is referring to those who are faithful and believe His promised salvation through the Messiah.

Second, God did choose to reveal Himself to the Jewish people and to sovereignly work through them to reveal Himself (power and character) to "all the earth." And, yes, He did sovereignly choose through whom the seed of Christ would come. Was this unjust (wrong)? No, this was a He didn't condemn the others who weren't in the line (e.g. the other seven brothers of Abraham or Esau). All can believe and be saved.

Third, God is sovereign to do what He needs to bring the Messiah and good news to all the earth. He has been patient with Israel and others in order make known His glory (23).

Fourth, yes, it is just. Righteousness was never achieved through works (following the Law) but by faith (cf. Abraham in chapter four). Most of the Jews rejected Christ and pursued righteousness by ritual and works while the gentiles (sinners) pursued righteousness by faith in Christ.

ASK: Do you ever feel what Paul felt – deep sorrow and concern for people you know who are outside of Christ?

SHARE: **Later**, when finish our conversation of application, let's pray for God to work in people's lives AND for God to use us to help other people. (cf. B.L.E.S.S. practices)

ASK: Some of the questions from this chapter imply that people feel like God failed with the Jews. Did God's word fail with the Jews? Why or why not?

ASK: Have you ever thought that the children of a "Christian" family or those who attend a "Christian" church should all be included in heaven? What do we learn from this chapter?

ASK: Do you sometimes feel tensions similar to what Paul expresses in this chapter? Are there times when God seems unfair or unjust?

ASK: Paul taught that pursuing law as the way of righteousness will fail (Chapter 3 and 9:31). Then what does God desire?

ASK: Do you ever wrestle with how God has worked in your own life? What has been difficult to accept? What gives you confidence that He is working now?

ASK: What have you learned from Scripture that helps you trust in God's ways?

ASK: How can we tell when we are still trying to earn God's favor? What are the signs?

ASK: According to 1 Peter 2:9, "You [disciples] are a chosen people." What might this mean about our character, lifestyle, and purpose? (See Romans 9:17)

Prayer Thoughts

- Let's give thanksgiving to God for His mercy and righteousness
- Let's pray for people in our lives for whom we have "anguish in our heart" because they are outside of Christ
- Let's ask God to empower us to make His name known in our worlds

May our God of mercy give you his wisdom and grace,

Steve