

ROMANS SEASON 3 WHAT WAS GOD THINKING?

CONNECT *BREAK THE ICE AND GET PEOPLE TALKING*

- At what point in life did you realize that your parents were merely human? How did it impact you?
 - What's one project or a task you did or that left you physically exhausted?
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TRUTH *UNDERSTAND AND DISCUSS THE SCRIPTURE'S MEANING*

In season three of our Romans series, our focus turns to God. Everything flows downstream from our thinking about God, because he's the one who has given us all the promises of the gospel. The way we feel about him—his character, his motivations, his trustworthiness—will impact everything we do. Romans nine is well known for causing strong reactions. It's also a centerpiece of theological debate. But it's not meant to make us proud in a theological position; it's meant to humble us and make us question our own assumptions about God and his motivation for doing what he does.

What About Israel?

READ: Romans 9:1-5

DISCUSS: Why do you think it's important to remember that Christianity has grown out of Israel's history?

Paul ended on a triumphant tone in chapter eight, but here he's in anguish. He'd be willing to do anything, even condemning himself, to change the hearts of unbelieving Jews. After all, God gave his great promises to Israel. The reason we should care about Israel's story is because the same God who gave promises to Israel, now gives us promises through the gospel. Israel's story is kind of like God's credit history—a track record of how reliable he is at fulfilling his promises. Israel's widespread unbelief begs the question, did God's promise to them fail? And the follow-up question, will his promises to those who believe the gospel fail? Very good questions.

God Chooses. We Don't Earn.

READ: Romans 9:6-18

DISCUSS: What kind of impact does this passage have on you?

It's not hard to be offended by this passage. After reading it, we might want to yell, "That's not fair!" God didn't fail Israel. He elected some to receive the promise by faith, not just those born into the family. Not only that, but he shows mercy to whoever he wants, and he hardens the hearts of whoever he wants. We can't earn God's mercy through any force of will. The prerogative to choose is God's and God's alone. Paul may have answered our question about Israel, but our chant of "It's not fair" now rises to a fever pitch!

God Is Motivated by Something Deeper Than Fairness

READ: Romans 9:19-29

DISCUSS: What other motivations does Paul put forward on God's part?

We might demand fairness, but after reading this passage, we must realize we don't want fairness. Fairness would mean that we get what Sodom and Gomorrah got—destruction by fire. Remember that all humanity apart from Christ is under God's wrath because of sin. However, God doesn't appear to be motivated by absolute fairness, and that's really good news for us. Through the gospel, God has chosen to call people who deserved the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, "my children." It's much, much better than fair.

GRACE *SEE HOW THE PASSAGE CONNECTS TO JESUS*

We've received something far better than fairness. We've received mercy. Jesus Christ came into the world and willingly gave up the fairness he deserved to take the judgment we deserved. We may not know all God's motivations comprehensively, but we do know that he loves us. He invites us to have childlike faith in his greater purpose.

CHANGE *APPLY THE PASSAGE TO OUR THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, AND ACTIONS*

- What push-back do you feel when reading this passage? How does the chapter help you address it?
 - Vessels of mercy are poured into, but they're also poured out of. Who in your life right now can you pour out this message of mercy to?
 - Given what God has done through Jesus, how does it make you feel about God?
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PRAYER *RESPOND TO THE PASSAGE IN PRAYER*

- Pray for childlike faith and humility.
- Pray for those who don't yet believe the gospel, that God would save them.

Discipleship Check-In

- Have you read your Bible consistently the past week?
- Who is someone you're praying to share Jesus with this week, and what's one way you can love them well?