

ROMANS SEASON 3 WHAT WAS GOD THINKING?

CONNECT *BREAK THE ICE AND GET PEOPLE TALKING*

- What was one high and one low for you the past week?
 - When you think back on your life, what's one experience that felt truly transcendent?
 - Do you think Christians should seek out awe-inspiring experiences? Why or why not?
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TRUTH *UNDERSTAND AND DISCUSS THE SCRIPTURE'S MEANING*

Imagine yourself looking out over a mountain range, or seeing a good friend after many years apart, or hearing a song that gives you goose bumps. We all long for moving experiences. In chapter eleven, Paul himself reaches a crescendo and erupts into song. But it's through the strangest route. He wants us to look at "the kindness and the severity of God." Somehow, seeing the strange interaction of God's kindness and severity should bring us into an awe-inspiring experience. In other words, if we let it, it'll make us worship.

The Kindness in God's Severity

READ: Romans 11:1-16

DISCUSS: Why do you think Israelites would be jealous that Gentiles were being saved?

In one of Jesus's most well-known teaching illustrations, a young man demands his portion of the inheritance from his dad, only to waste it on reckless living. He returns to his dad, not expecting much, but his dad throws him a huge party to celebrate. The older brother is jealous, and he stands outside the party, refusing to go in. In his mind, the younger brother doesn't deserve it. But his dad invites him to change his attitude and join the party. Here's how this connects to our passage: Israel stumbled, and this let Gentiles become part of his people. This made Israel jealous, but God invites them to the party through faith in Jesus. His response to unfaithfulness is severe, but his hands remained open in kindness.

The Severity in God's Kindness

READ: Romans 11:17-24

DISCUSS: What does Paul warn the Gentile Christians not to do?

Imagine a sequel to the story above of the two brothers. While enjoying the dinner party, the younger brother hears that the older brother is standing outside, jealous, refusing to come in. The younger brother starts to mock the older, saying, "Look at this great party, and it's all for me. What a fool my brother is!" We'd call that arrogant and unkind. We'd also suggest that he think about the wreck his life was just a couple days earlier. What would the dad do if he heard about the younger brother's arrogance? Something severe, no doubt. That's Paul's point. If

Christians use their standing with God as a reason to start looking down their noses at other people, God's response will be severe.

GRACE *SEE HOW THE PASSAGE CONNECTS TO JESUS*

The Kind One Who Took Severity

READ: Romans 11:25-36

DISCUSS: What stands out to you from these verses and why?

Paul's song of awe and wonder starts right after verse 32, where he says that "God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all." We're all up the same creek, and it's because of our disobedience. We're all younger brothers and older brothers. Our disobedience was so much worse than we imagined, so bad that Jesus had to die on the cross to forgive it. He was treated severely in our place, and now by faith in his name, he pours out kindness on us. Praise be to God for his incredible mercy!

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

- Do you have any objections to God being severe and kind? How does this passage affect those hang-ups?
 - Do you see any arrogance—being ugly towards people who don't believe like you do—in your own life that you need to repent of?
 - Do you find it easy or hard to worship? How does this passage help you?
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PRAYER *RESPOND TO THE PASSAGE IN PRAYER*

- Read verses 33-36 slowly and praise God like Paul does.
- Pray for the perspective you need to continue living in light of God's kindness.

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?