

Kindness

God's plan for redemption includes all people.

ROMANS 11:11-24

Who should be included on the invitation list? That question often puts event planners in a tough spot. They must determine how many invitations can be sent based on the event's purpose and the budget available. Ultimately, they're forced to wrestle with the difficult decision of who will receive an invitation and who will not. They would never simply declare that everyone is invited. Yet that's exactly what God does. His invitation is open to all.

When was the last time you received an unexpected invitation to something? What has God shown you about His open invitation to everyone?

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UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

ROMANS 11:1-36

In Romans 11, Paul raised two crucial questions about Gentiles who had been saved. First, he asked if God had rejected the Jews. He answered the question by pointing to himself. He was a Jew who had been loyal to Judaism when he gave his life to Christ. Then Paul mentioned God's encounter with Elijah. Elijah considered himself to be the last standing Israelite. God assured the prophet there were other Israelites who were loyal to Him.

Second, he asked if the Jews had gone too far in their rejection of Christ. The answer to this question sheds light on the truth about God's grace. Paul used the image of a tree with grafted branches to exhibit God's grace to Jews and Gentiles. Jews who rejected Christ would be like branches that had been removed from the tree. When they turned to Christ by faith, they would be restored to Him. In that way, God's grace would be extended to believing Jews as well as believing Gentiles.

Paul stressed that God had not turned His back on Israel. His mercy toward the Jews would never be smothered. Quite the opposite, His abiding love for them would always fuel the fire of His mercy toward them. His love for them reached all the way back to the original Old Testament patriarchs who followed His leadership during the formative years of Israel's history. Consequently, God showed his mercy to Jews and Gentiles alike.

Explanation gave way to adoration as Paul continued to write about God and His relationship with His people. The apostle praised God for His priceless wisdom and awe-inspiring judgments. He also glorified God because His relationship with His people enriched them in ways they would never be able to comprehend completely.

Read Romans 11 in your Bible and underline each reference to God's grace and mercy. What insights into God and His character do you garner from these references?

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EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

REJECTION (ROM. 11:11-16)

[11] I ask, then, have they stumbled so as to fall? Absolutely not! On the contrary, by their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel jealous. [12] Now if their transgression brings riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fullness bring! [13] Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Insofar as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, [14] if I might somehow make my own people jealous and save some of them. [15] For if their rejection brings reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? [16] Now if the firstfruits are holy, so is the whole batch. And if the root is holy, so are the branches.

VERSE 11

After answering the question about whether God had rejected the Jews, Paul went on to ask if they had gone too far in their rejection of God's gift of salvation through Christ. He answered the question decisively: ***Absolutely not!*** He acknowledged they had ***stumbled*** over Jesus instead of embracing Him. However, their ***transgression*** when they rejected Christ opened the door for the gospel to be shared with the ***Gentiles***. When the Gentiles heard the message about ***salvation*** through Christ, they received Him. In turn, the Jews became ***jealous*** of them.

VERSE 12

God transformed Israel's ***transgression*** into a blessing for the Gentiles, allowing them to experience the benefits that come with believing in Christ. The Gentiles brought spiritual richness to their lives. In this way, Israel's ***failure*** to turn to Christ opened the door for people across ***the world*** to come to Him by faith. From that point, Paul shifted his focus toward his hope for Israel's future. Although Israel's spiritual emptiness had not prevented others from being saved, he wondered what would happen when the Jewish people themselves embraced Christ and experienced the ***fullness*** of life found in Him.

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VERSES 13-15

Paul was writing this to the ***Gentiles***. When they saw the pronoun ***you*** in his letter, they could rest assured that he was writing to them. God had called Paul to be an ***apostle*** to the Gentiles who would share the gospel with them. He also helped to establish several churches. Therefore, Paul wanted to shine a light on what God had done through his ***ministry***.

Paul's purpose in writing about the effectiveness of his ministry had nothing to do with selfish pride. He knew God alone deserved the credit for the victories in his missionary work. His interest in sharing the glowing reports of salvation among the Gentiles centered in fostering jealousy among Jewish people. In their selfish pride, Jewish people had come to believe that God worked through them exclusively. Now they could see Him at work in the lives of others. Paul hoped their envy would give way to their surrender to Christ.

Instead of pouring cold water on the fire that the gospel had started, Israel's rejection of Christ fueled the blaze even more. Gentiles everywhere experienced the wonder of •***reconciliation*** with God. Paul pondered what would happen when the rejection of the Jewish people turned into their ***acceptance*** of Him. He compared it to something like resurrection. Their spiritual awakening would look like ***life*** that been sparked ***from the dead***.

VERSE 16

The possibility of the Jews receiving Christ prompted Paul to reflect on the stewardship principle of •***firstfruits***. In the Old Testament, God instructed His people to present a loaf of bread as an offering to Him from the first batch of dough after the grain harvest (Num. 15:17-21). By setting the first loaf apart to Him, they acknowledged that the entire batch had been made ***holy*** to Him. Paul elaborated on the principle by bringing a tree into view. If the ***root*** of the tree had been dedicated to God as ***holy***, then the ***branches*** would be set apart for Him too.

What may cause someone to reject the gospel?

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If God's plan of salvation embraces all peoples, what is one next step—prayer, conversation, hospitality, giving, or going—you will take to participate in that plan this week?

KEY DOCTRINE: *God's Purpose of Grace*

Election is the glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility. (See Ephesians 1:4-6; 1 Peter 2:9-10.)

GRAFTED (ROM. 11:17-22)

17 Now if some of the branches were broken off, and you, though a wild olive branch, were grafted in among them and have come to share in the rich root of the cultivated olive tree, 18 do not boast that you are better than those branches. But if you do boast—you do not sustain the root, but the root sustains you. 19 Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." 20 True enough; they were broken off because of unbelief, but you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but beware, 21 because if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. 22 Therefore, consider God's kindness and severity: severity toward those who have fallen but God's kindness toward you—if you remain in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.

VERSES 17-19

The imagery of a tree continued to provide Paul with a helpful word picture to use as he explained the truth about Gentiles who gave their lives to Christ. Paul compared them to a ***wild olive branch***. God ***grafted*** them in so they could thrive as His people. Also, the ***root*** brought to mind the nourishing presence of God among His people. The grafted branch flourished because it enjoyed the privilege of receiving the same kind of nourishment that had enriched the ***cultivated olive tree***. Of course, Paul intended for the cultivated tree to serve as a reference to Jewish people.

The temptation for Gentiles to ***boast*** over such a privilege compelled Paul to call attention to it. They ran the risk of considering

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themselves to be ***better than*** the Jews. He referred to Jewish people as ***those branches***. Boasting would show that Gentiles had forgotten the central truth about their salvation. It did not center in the branch. Instead, their salvation started in the root. In other words, the applause over salvation belonged to God. He had been like the root that sustained the branch.

Gentiles who boasted about being saved had become blind to the most important aspect of their salvation. They demonstrated that they had damaged their spiritual vision by considering themselves to be God's favorites. Such a declaration would have suggested that God moved the Jewish people out of the way to make room for them. Using the image of the olive tree, they ran the risk of saying that God decided He would prune the Jewish branches so He could graft in the Gentile branches. Consequently, it would have implied that God loved Gentiles more than Jews.

VERSES 20-21

Paul conceded that people who rejected Christ could have been compared to branches that were ***broken off*** the tree. However, God's pruning of them was not because He didn't love them. Instead, their ***unbelief*** led to their removal. By the same token, By His grace, He grafted Gentiles onto the tree according to their ***faith*** in Christ. Gentile Christians needed to ***beware*** of arrogance.

God would ***not spare*** Jewish people who rejected His way of salvation through Christ. He removed them even though they had been rooted in a relationship with Him that began in the early days of the Old Testament. Therefore, Gentiles needed to remember that He would ***not spare*** them ***either***.

He made no distinction between Jews and Gentiles regarding who would be saved.

VERSE 22

God demonstrated His grace with countless expressions of His ***kindness***. He made no distinction between Jews and Gentiles regarding who would be saved. But neither did He exhibit any distinction regarding His ***severity***. He would judge anyone who had ***fallen*** into the trap of spiritual arrogance. For that reason, Gentile and Jewish Christians demonstrated wisdom by responding humbly to God's kindness.

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When might we feel boastful of our spiritual blessings? How can we turn from spiritual pride to genuine care?

RESTORATION (ROM. 11:23-24)

[23] And even they, if they do not remain in unbelief, will be grafted in, because God has the power to graft them in again. [24] For if you were cut off from your native wild olive tree and against nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these—the natural branches—be grafted into their own olive tree?

VERSE 23

For the Jews, being removed did not mean their relationship with God would never be restored. However, their restoration depended on their willingness to return to Him. ***If*** they came to the point in their lives where they would no longer ***remain*** in their ***unbelief***, He would be gracious to them. Using the word picture of a tree once more, Paul assured believing Jews that they would be ***grafted in*** by God's grace. The branch would be grafted into the root. In other words, the relationship that believing Jews had with Him would be restored.

Their hope for restoration in their relationship with God did not rest with their ability to persuade Him to change His mind about them. They could not have won God's favor by promising to be better or do more as Jewish people. Rather, the only fitting response that they could make to Him was to abandon their unbelief and put their faith in Christ alone. If they made such a response, they could trust God to be gracious and open His arms to them.

God alone had the ***power*** to restore their relationship with Him. Compelled by His grace, He would exert His power to make restoration possible. Paul declared that God would ***graft them in again*** when they turned to Christ by faith.

VERSE 24

Paul turned his attention to believing Gentiles. Once again, the image of a tree enabled him to affirm Gentiles who received Christ. They started as branches of their ***native wild olive tree***.

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When Jesus came into their lives, something remarkable took place. Like branches that were ***grafted into a cultivated olive tree,*** they became members of God's family. By being grafted in, they received enriching nourishment from the root of the cultivated tree. In other words, God enriched believing Gentiles in the same way that He nourished believing Jews.

God saved Gentiles who entrusted their lives to Christ, and He did something that went against what farmers had learned in nature about olive trees. In those days, farmers would take a branch of a cultivated olive tree and graft it into a native olive tree. Grafting a branch in that way would make the native olive tree more productive. God grafted believing Gentiles into the cultivated tree with believing Jews. As a result, the tree that included Gentiles as well as Jews who trusted in Christ became stronger and more productive.

What do you learn about God's heart from His willingness to restore those who previously rejected Him? How might that influence the way you view people who have walked away from faith?

BIBLE SKILL: *Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a major doctrine.*

This session emphasizes a Christian's eternal security once he or she has accepted Christ as Savior. Paul's teaching refutes the idea that true believers are in jeopardy of losing their salvation. Read the following Bible passages and note what each one teaches about the security of the believer: Matthew 10:22; 24:13; John 5:24; 6:37; 10:27-28; Romans 8:38-39; Philippians 1:6; 1 John 2:19; 3:9; Jude 1:24-25.

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APPLY THE TEXT

- We can be assured that the gospel is for all people.
- As members of God's family, believers should embrace humility and resist spiritual pridefulness.
- Believers can take comfort in knowing God has the power to save those who repent.

Share with your Bible study group how you will apply the truth that God intends for everyone to hear the gospel. In what ways would a lack of humility prevent you from sharing the good news of Christ?

As you reflect on God's power to save anyone, who have you considered "unreachable"? Commit to pray for that person's salvation. What barriers do you need to remove so you can share the gospel with that person?

Memorize Romans 11:33.

Prayer Needs

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