

**Facilitator:**

1. Open with prayer.
2. Welcome any newcomers.
3. Try to keep your discussion to an hour at the most.

**Facilitator:** Encourage your members to **BRING THEIR BIBLES** and use them during Connect Group.

**CONNECT Group study questions for Nov. 18, 2018**

**Title: “Handling Gray Areas, Part 3”**

1. The homework from last week was this:

*Romans 14:23 says, “For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.” Spend time in prayer asking God to help you examine where this principle applies to your life. As you pray, remember 1) our personal convictions about gray areas (everything, really) need to come from God; they are between us and God. So 2) when you don’t keep a personal conviction, you have sinned.*

As much as you are comfortable, share with your group what God showed you about yourself this week.

*Facilitator: before your group meets, prepare something from your prayer time last week to share with your group to get the discussion started and to show your group members how to share in a way that is personal and appropriate.*

**Read Romans 15:1-3**

2. Paul says that we have an obligation to “please” our neighbor for his good and to build up our neighbor.

-What are some practical ways we (as individuals and as a group) can work for the good of those around us and to build them up?

-Why is this so often hard for us to do?

-How can we overcome these obstacles to obedience?

*Facilitator: as your group brainstorms, remind them that the command here isn’t to simply “make other people happy at your own expense.” The command here is to “please them” for their own good and to build them up. This should make a big difference in our understanding of how to apply these verses. It is not our job to give to people whatever they demand of us, nor is it always in the best interest of someone to give them what they think might please them. Our duty is to work for their good as God instructs.*

*As your group thinks through obstacles to obeying God in this, they will probably hit upon two difficult realities. First, even if we love to give and to help others, our hearts always rebel against the notion that we should sacrifice ourselves to help others. Paul, however, calls us to live out the life of Christ. He sacrificed himself for our good, to build us up. As Christ was to us, that’s how we should be to other people. Second, it isn’t always easy to know what will result in someone’s ultimate good. Is it good to give money to a beggar outside of Walmart? Sometimes it is. Sometimes it isn’t. And often it is impossible for us to know. We can, however, keep a few things in mind: 1) hearing and believing the gospel is always good for someone, regardless of their circumstances. Start*

there. 2) Though we are responsible for being obedient to Christ and loving people, we are not responsible for the bad, self-destructive things people do with our generosity. And 3) God understands our weakness, and we trust that his grace will be sufficient when we get this wrong.

*Don't let the discussion end without calling your group to action. What are you all going to do as a group to be more on the mission that Christ is on? God is calling us to know Christ more and more and to make him known throughout the world.*

### **Read Romans 15:4-7**

3. In these verses, Paul makes yet another appeal to unity. You have discussed this for two weeks now, but don't miss the application of these verses: The church of Jesus Christ must throw off all racial, social, cultural, and philosophical preferences for the purposes of praise and unity.

-Why do you think unity, especially racial unity, is so important to God?

-What are some Bible passages that point toward racial unity in the Church?

-What are some practical ways that we can voluntarily and lovingly set aside our racial and cultural preferences to promote racial unity in the Church? In our church?

*Facilitator: You can review with your group what we have said about unity over the past two weeks:*

- *The gospel - Jesus taught us that when we love one another, the world knows that the gospel is true (see John 15). Paul taught us that when we are divided on issues (especially on racial issues), we preach a false gospel with our actions (see Galatians 2 and Philemon). But when we are unified, when we live together in gospel harmony even with all our differences, God uses us to get the gospel to the nations.*

- *The mission - For Paul the unity of the church and the mission of the church go hand in hand. We have one mission, to get the gospel to the ends of the earth, and it will take all of our combined efforts to be faithful to Christ's mission. "How can anyone hear the gospel and be saved unless we send missionaries to them?" Paul asks in Romans 10. And for Paul, disunity, strife, and our failures to get along are the worst enemies of the unity that our mission requires (e.g. 1 Corinthians 1-4, Philippians 1-4, etc.).*

- *Our Growth - Disunity in the church is also a hindrance to our own discipleship. God put people in our lives who think differently than us. They are different ages, races, genders, different backgrounds. He put them in our lives to show us our blind spots, so that we might grow in the gospel. When the church is divided, we lose some of those voices. God wants the church to be very diverse, but he wants us to be unified in our devotion to Christ and his mission.*

*Here are some passages that might come up as your group discusses this issue, and if your group gets stuck, talk about these with them:*

*-Matthew 28:18-20 - God loves all the nations so much that he calls his children to give the ultimate sacrifice--to make their lives about taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. God wants his church to be made up of every race.*

*-Galatians 2:11-14 - Any attitude or behavior (even if it for the sake of getting along) that indicates that God prefers one race over another is sin and ultimately preaches a false gospel.*

*-Galatians 3:28-29 - God created racial diversity, and he created male and female. God loves diversity, but in God's family there is no racial distinction. All those who have faith are the children of Abraham and thus are God's children and heirs of the promises.*

*-Revelation 7:9-12 - When John pictures the kingdom of God in heaven, he spends most of his words describing their racial and ethnic diversity (tribe, language, race, etc.). This is what God wants and intends for his people.*

*As your group brainstorms how they can obey Christ in this, help them think through questions like 1) How would you feel if the culture (music, etc.) of our church changed dramatically, and large numbers of black and Hispanic people started coming to our church? 2) When was the last time you shared the gospel with someone of another race or culture? 3) If God called you to leave Summerville and go live in another culture with a group of people of another race so they might hear the gospel, would you go? What might cause you hesitation to obey God in that way?*

### **Read Romans 15:8-13**

4. Paul says that Christ became a "servant" to the "circumcised" so that the gentiles might hear the good news. What does Paul intend to argue by citing each of these Old Testament passages?

*Facilitator: Here as well as throughout the book of Romans, Paul argues that Jesus was born Jewish, under the law, so that he might be the savior, not just of the Jews, but of the whole world. The quotes in 15:8-13 come from the following Old Testament texts:*

- Rm 15:9 from 2 Sam 22 and Ps 18*
- Rm 15:10 from Deut 32*
- Rm 15:11 from Ps 117*
- Rm 15:12 from Isa 11*

*In Romans 15:8-13 Paul wants to make it clear that 1) God doesn't have a favorite race; God loves the whole world. 2) God has always intended to use Israel's sin and disobedience to save the whole world. 3) The promises that God made to the "patriarchs" was the salvation of the nations. 4) Jesus is the savior of the whole world. And 5) God's love for the whole world, should be the great hope and mission of the church.*