



Discussion Guide

Date: 8/23/2026

Sermon Title: How do I grow in my faith?

Scripture: Romans 12:1-2

This discussion guide is a layout to be used with a group or class. We have included opening and closing prayers to start and end your group. The guide may be used for personal or family reflection as well.

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious and loving God, we come before you today grateful that you have called us your own. Before we could ever take a step toward you, you were already reaching toward us with your grace. Open our hearts and minds as we study your Word together. Help us to hear not simply what Paul wrote to the church in Rome, but what you are saying to us today. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

THE CONTEXT OF ROMANS 12:

Romans 12 begins a significant transition in Paul's letter. For the first eleven chapters, Paul spends considerable time explaining God's grace, salvation, sin, reconciliation, faith, and God's work through Christ. Then Paul writes, essentially: Because of everything God has done, how should we now live? That is why the word "therefore" at the beginning of Romans 12 matters. Paul isn't telling people: "Do these things so that God will love you." He is saying: "Because God has already loved you, saved you, and shown you mercy, let that grace transform how you live." Romans 12:1 describes presenting ourselves to God as a "living sacrifices." Romans 12:2 then describes transformation through the renewing of our minds. The NRSV language connects this with worship and discernment.

A helpful way to summarize Paul: God's grace → our response → transformation → discernment → faithful living. Notice that Paul doesn't stop at verse 2. Romans 12:3–8 immediately begins talking about the body of Christ, different gifts, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, and leading. That matters because spiritual growth is personal, but it is never merely private. We grow in Christ with one another in community.

OPENING QUESTIONS: Choose one of the following questions to start your group or class with.

1. Have you ever felt internal pressure to perform or achieve in order to feel worthy or valuable? Where do you think that pressure comes from?
2. Romans 12:1-2 describes a life of offering ourselves fully to God and being transformed rather than conformed. Where do you feel the pull of conformity most strongly in your everyday life?
3. Romans 12:2 describes the renewing of the mind as the path to discerning God's will. What is one area of your thinking that you sense God may be inviting you to renew right now?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: Read Romans 12:1–8 together rather than stopping at verse 2. Then use the following prompts and questions to work through the text.

Verse 1 — "Therefore"

1. What does the word "therefore" connect this passage to?
2. What has God already done before Paul asks us to respond?
3. How does remembering God's mercy change the way we think about spiritual disciplines?

Verse 1 — "Living sacrifice"

4. What would it mean to offer your whole life to God?
5. What parts of your life are easiest to give to God? What parts are hardest?

Verse 2 — "Do not be conformed"

6. What are some "patterns" our culture encourages that can shape us without our noticing?
7. What voices are forming you every day? There can be good and bad voices, try naming both.
8. How can you tell whether something is shaping you toward Christ or away from Christ?

Verse 2 — "Be transformed"

9. What is the difference between conforming and transforming?
10. What does transformation look like in everyday life?
11. Where do you most need God to renew your mind?

Verse 2 — "Discern"

12. How do we learn to recognize God's will?
13. What practices help you discern God's voice?
14. Who are the people you trust to help you discern God's direction?

Verses 3–8 — The Body of Christ

15. Why does Paul move from personal transformation to talking about the church?
16. What does this tell us about individual versus communal discipleship?
17. What gifts has God given you?
18. How might using your gifts help you grow?
19. How might someone else's gifts help you grow?

SERMON QUESTIONS:

1. In what areas of your own life might you be seeking to 'earn' your value, and how does God's unconditional love challenge that tendency?
2. Romans 12:1-2 calls believers not to be conformed to the world but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds. What specific values of modern society do you find most difficult to resist, and why?
3. A quote from the sermon Dallas Willard said, "Grace is not opposed to effort; it is opposed to earning". How do you personally navigate the balance between striving to grow in faith and trusting that God has already done the redemptive work?
4. Pastor Allison describes a class with no syllabus and no grades, where learning happened through conversation, as a transformative experience. How might adopting a similar posture of openness and dialogue deepen your engagement with your faith community?
5. The sermon suggests that 'God's grace meets our effort and creates growth'; can you think of a moment in your own spiritual journey where you experienced that intersection of divine grace and personal effort?

6. If the question shifts from 'Am I doing enough to make God happy?' to 'How do I grow in my faith?', how does that reframing change your motivation for engaging in spiritual practices like prayer, worship, and service?

SCRIPTURE: WE NEED MORE THAN SUNDAY

Read: 2 Timothy 3:14–17 - Paul reminds Timothy of the importance of Scripture for teaching, correction, training, and equipping God's people. Then compare this with Psalm 1:1–3. The image is of a person who meditates on God's instruction and becomes like a tree planted beside streams of water.

1. What happens when Scripture becomes something we only hear on Sunday?
2. What difference does reading Scripture during the week make?
3. What makes Bible reading difficult for you?
4. Do you tend to read Scripture for information, inspiration, direction, or transformation?
5. What would it look like to develop a sustainable rhythm of reading Scripture at home?
6. What is one book of the Bible you would like to understand better?

A practical challenge Instead of saying: "I need to read the Bible more." Try: "I will read Scripture for 10 minutes, three days this week." The goal is not perfection remember this is a practice. We don't do this alone; God has given us community. You may want to join a Sunday class, a small group, or a learning community if you are not currently engaged in one. Learn more at fumcr.com/grow.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Gracious God, thank you for the gift of your grace. Thank you that we do not have to earn your love, prove ourselves to you, or become perfect before we belong. You have already reached toward us in Jesus Christ and invited us into your family. Give us courage to take the next step when you call us beyond our comfort zones. Help us remember that the goal of our growth is not simply to know more about you, but to love you more deeply and to love our neighbors more faithfully. We offer ourselves to you again on this day and strive to follow you faithfully this week. In the name of Jesus Christ, who calls us, loves us, and walks with us. Amen.

WAYS TO RESPOND:

Choose ONE of the following practices to focus on this week:

1. When you pray, serve, give, or read scripture this week, take time to pause and ask yourself honestly: am I doing this to earn something, or am I responding to love I have already received?
2. Practice being present on the journey. Resist your urge to rush toward outcomes or results. Choose one relationship, one habit, or one spiritual practice this week and simply show up for it without measuring what you get out of it.
3. Reach out this week to one person in your faith community. Share something real about where you are on your spiritual journey. Invite them to do the same. Let the conversation be the growth.