

## Session 1. Identity: Romans 1:1-7

In our new series for Hope House Connect Groups we are going to consider the book of Romans. What does it say and how does it impact our lives today. We will be taking a very practical approach to encourage conversation, encouragement and prayer. We begin with two sessions considering Identity and community.

**Aim of the session:** to establish that we find our true identity in Jesus.

**Icebreaker: Pictionary.** Take small stacks of paper with one page for each participant. Ask each person to write an adjective to describe themselves, then pass their stack of paper clockwise, The next person must draw a representation of the written word, then pass on again (after about 30 seconds) and next person must write a word to name what is drawn without looking at any previous sheets, Continue passing until stacks go all the way around the group

Conclusion: Each person shares the adjective that they wrote originally, and then discuss the final drawing or word when it got back to them, depending on time maybe sharing one of the funnier drawings or words from the chain. Identity...

### Introduction.

This evening we are going to be looking at the topic of identity. The most effective and attractive communities are made of of people who know who they are.

### Romans 1:1-7. Read

- This is a very unusual introduction to a letter compared with one we send or receive today.
- Paul gives a very full explanation of his own identity and the identity of his recipient.
- For Paul, the Good News about Jesus radically alters the way we see ourselves - it shapes our identity.

### The Ingredients of Identity.

If we look at these verses carefully four things emerge about how we should see ourselves.

#### 1. A servant.

The nature of a servant. Discuss how Paul sees his servant nature in verse 1.

People often try to establish their identity as a way of putting themselves above or before other or to help them stand out. **Question.** Have any of us ever done that? (Not an intense question).

Paul starts by placing himself to the bottom. He is a slave.

- The implications of of understanding our identity as servants means we are encouraged to do anything for God. Not always looking to for visible roles, but being willing to serve in whatever way he calls.

### Illustration & discussion.

Who can you think of that you've seen serving that often goes unrecognised or unappreciated?

#### 2. Loved by God.

We should see ourselves as those loved by God (not easy for some people).  
We all need to be loved and to know we are loved. It is a basic human need.

### Being loved by God.

**Question & Discussion.** Does God love us for our achievement or personality or position?

- Paul writes to those, "who are loved by God in Rome". They need to know they are loved
- Augustine wrote that the Bible does nothing else, but tell us of God's love.
- It is the reason God created the world.
- It is the reason He gave his Son, "for God so loved the world".
- It is the reason Christ died on cross.
- It is part of the reason His Holy Spirit is given to us.
- It is the reason we are given eternal life, "so that neither death nor life could separate us from the love of God".

**The need to be loved.**

The first thing Paul wrote to the church in Rome was that they were loved by God. Do we know we are loved?

What can we do within Hope House to help people know they are loved, not just by God, but by His people church?

**Conclusion.**

This isn't about achievement, personality, position, or power, but how God sees us and what he has done for us. God loves you.

Out of that love and the value God has placed on us our service grows.

**Close.**

Take a moment to make a loving and encouraging statement about someone in the room and then take a few moments to pray for one another.

## Session 2. Identity and Community. Romans 1:1-7

**Aim of the session.** This week we are going to consider our identity as part of a community and perhaps discover what this may mean in a practical sense.

### Icebreaker.

Circles: each person will need one piece of paper and a pen.

Write your name in a centre circle drawn in the middle of the paper and draw seven smaller circles connected to the larger circle. In the smaller circles, write the names of seven groups you are connected to (examples: gender, nationality/ethnicity, church, company/job, political stance, geographic ties, family, hobby group etc)

Ask individuals to answer the following questions:

- a. Talk about a time when you felt proud to be a member of a certain group.
- b. When did it feel painful to be a member of a certain group?
- c. What groups might be an asset or a challenge to belong to?
- d. Is there a group you would like to belong to?

### Read Romans 1:1-7.

#### 3. Belonging to Jesus.

We should see ourselves as those belonging to Jesus. V6

We are called to belong to His Holy people. V7

### The Need to Belong.

A Radiohead song, Creep, goes, "I'm a creep, I'm a weirdo, what the hell am I doing here? I don't belong here."

Many people find it easy to see why they don't belong or fit in.

**Question & Illustration.** What have you done in the past to try and fit in? (Maybe in school etc).

CS Lewis wrote an essay called the *Inner Ring*, in which he described this phenomenon of always being outside the the group or circle called the 'inner ring'. "There exists within all of us the desire to be inside the ring and the terror of being left outside". Whenever we get inside one ring we discover there's a mother we are excluded from.

### The Way We Belong.

- The Christian community should be marked by people who know that they belong, because, instead of belonging to a group, first of all we belong to a person, Jesus.
- Verse 6 describes his readers as those called 'to belong to Jesus'.
- Kaka the Brazilian footballer and previous world player of the year often wore a t-shirt with "I belong to Jesus' ready to show whenever he scored.

What other verses in the NT can we find about belonging and being called to Jesus/God?

### Implications of Belonging.

- When we know we belong to Jesus this makes us incredibly secure as people.
- It means we don't need to spend out time trying to be in the in crowd, or worrying about fitting in because we already belong.

**Discussion Point.** How could this 'belonging' effect our 'going' and sharing the Good News?

#### 4. **Purpose.**

We have seen that we have an identity in Jesus.

We have seen that we belong to Jesus.

Being a Christian also means that we have a purpose in Jesus.

Verse 7, God's people are called to be "his Holy people" (Saints in some version of the NT)

#### **General and Specific Purpose (calling).**

Being a Christian means having a general calling and a specific calling.

- We all have a general calling to - to serve God - to be obedient - to be Holy (Saints)
- Being a 'Holy/Saint' means being different (Don't be frightened it doesn't mean you are to be perfect or else), called to be distinct for the world around us.
- We are to be 'transformed by the renewing of our minds - different to the world'.

#### **Question & Discussion.**

How have you had to be distinct and different from those around you because of your faith?

- Paul knew his specific calling was to preach to the non-Jews.
- You may not know your specific 'calling' yet, but that doesn't matter. The important thing is that we know we are each essential to God's purpose and belong to him and His Church. All we are really called to do is to be willing to serve Him however we can.

#### **Conclusion.**

Four amazing things we need to understand: we are servants, we are loved, we belong, we have purpose.

- It is really important that we understand our identity, but we don't find that from looking within ourselves, but by looking at Jesus.
- We forget who we are when we forget who God is.

#### **Prayer.**

Standing together (for those who can stand) have an open time of prayer and praise asking God to confirm our identities and our belonging and asking him to show us how we can serve Him and find our purpose individually and together as Hope House Church.

**PAUL LONGS TO SEE THE ROMAN CHRISTIANS**

8 Let me say first that I thank my God for all of you, through Jesus the king, because all the world has heard the news of your faith. 9 God is my witness –the God I worship in my spirit, in the good news of his son –that I never stop remembering you 10 in my prayers. I ask God again and again that somehow at last I may now be able, in his good purposes, to come to you. 11 I’m longing to see you! I want to share with you some spiritual blessing to give you strength; 12 that is, I want to encourage you, and be encouraged by you, in the faith we share. 13 I really do want you to know, my dear family, that I’ve often made plans to come to you; it’s just that up to now something has always got in the way. I want to bear some fruit among you, as I have been doing among the other nations.

**GOOD NEWS, SALVATION AND THE JUSTICE OF GOD**

14 I am under obligation to barbarians as well as to Greeks, you see; both to the wise and to the foolish. 15 That’s why I’m eager to announce the good news to you, too, in Rome. 16 I’m not ashamed of the good news; it’s God’s power, bringing salvation to everyone who believes –to the Jew first, and also, equally, to the Greek. 17 This is because God’s covenant justice is unveiled in it, from faithfulness to faithfulness. As it says in the Bible, ‘the just shall live by faith’.

*From N T Wright’s New Testament for Everyone translation*

**Recap on last time**

Last month we looked at the introductory verses of Romans and the theme of Identity – how we should see ourselves in the light of what Jesus has done for us. This month we are going to be looking at the next section of Romans and the theme of commitment.

**Ice Breaker: See Worksheet****What’s so important about commitment**

Commitment is essential for all healthy relationships. Those who have a fear of commitment struggle in their relationships. The psychiatrist, M. Scott Peck, describes commitment as ‘the foundation, the bedrock of any genuinely loving relationship.’ It is always a risk, but it is a vital element in loving one another.

- It is essential for marriage and is the content of the marriage vows at a wedding.
- Commitment is vital for parenting, and giving children the security they need to mature.
- It enables friendship to have real depth.
- Commitment creates trust, helps us take risks with one another, and enables us to overcome obstacles.
- Commitment is one of the key marks of the Christian community. But this commitment to one another is not always easy or natural.

**Paul’s commitments**

In his letter to the Romans Paul is attempting to overcome several obstacles and divisions. (Read the commentary for more background on this).

- He is trying to overcome divisions between Jews and Gentiles in the church in Rome – two groups who have hated each other for many years and who thought each other immoral and uncivilised.
- He is trying to overcome the distance between the church in Rome and himself. Unlike the other churches he wrote to, Paul did not found the church in Rome, and so did not have automatic authority with them.

Paul manages to overcome these obstacles by showing that he is committed to the church in Rome. Paul’s commitment to them is what gives him the authority to write this letter. In this letter he will go on to teach doctrine and ethics, what the Romans should believe and how they should behave, but he is not teaching them as someone who is an objective observer, analysing them from a distance. There are five vital commitments that we need to make if we are going to be a community that can overcome differences, deal with conflicts and disappointments, and form an effective and united community.

## 1. Commit to thank God for one another v8

First, we need to commit to thank God for one another. Paul thanks God for the Romans. Paul has lots he wants to say to the Romans, because he thinks they have got things wrong in their belief and behaviour. But he starts, in verse 8, by thanking God for what they have done right. This is a vital way we can grow as a community.

### Group Discussion

#### Why do we thank God for one another?

*SOME IDEAS (if they are struggling)*

*When we thank God it forces us to pay attention to what God has given us. When we thank God for other people it forces us to look for the best in them.*

### Illustration

Give an example of when this has happened to you i.e. when you have decided to thank God for someone and in doing so, have seen good in them that you hadn't seen before.

*The Point is that we see what we are looking for: if we look for the worst in people we will see their faults, but if we choose to thank God for one another we start to see the best in them.*

This is our first commitment to one another – to thank God for one another.

## 2. Commit to pray for one another v9 & 10

Secondly we commit to pray for one another.

Paul reminds the church in Rome that he is praying for them, constantly.

Praying for one another, and with one another, achieves extraordinary things.

### Group Discussion

#### Why is the bible so strong on our need to pray for one another?

(e.g. 1 Tim 2:1-3; James 5:16; Eph 6:18; Matt 5:44)

*SOME IDEAS (if they are struggling)*

#### **TRANSFORMATION**

*It changes us.  
It changes others.  
It changes communities.*

#### **INTIMACY**

*Breaks down barriers.  
Creates closeness.  
Creates a bond in marriages and friendships.  
Physical distance is not an issue.*

#### **LOVING**

*Praying is one of the primary ways we love each other.  
It is essential for healthy relationships.  
It's the best thing we can do for one another.*

### Prayer Time (15 mins)

Get the group to think of someone they find it hard to get along with (in the church, at work, family, neighbour etc) and then encourage them to spend a few minutes in silent prayer thanking God for that person.

Get the group to pair up and give them time to ask their partner what they would like prayer for, and then spend a few minutes praying for them. Then return the favour.

Ask everyone to commit to continue to pray for these two things (the person they struggle with and the person they were paired with) until the next CG study (not the CS&P). Encourage them to keep in touch with their prayer partner about the things they are giving and receiving prayer for.

## PAUL LONGS TO SEE THE ROMAN CHRISTIANS

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*From N T Wright’s New Testament for Everyone translation*

*Recap on last time*

Last time we looked at what’s so important about commitment and the first 2 of the 5 commitments Paul makes to the Church in Rome: 1. Commit to thank God for one another and 2. Commit to pray for one another. This week we will look at the other 3 of the 5.

*Ice Breaker*

Ask each person in the group to give a short update about what they have been praying about since session 3 – has it made them change their mind about the person they struggled with? Has the person they paired with seen any answers to their prayers?

*3. Commit to learn from one another v12*

The most effective communities are those where everyone is learning from one another. Both teaching and listening. We commit both to teach one another and learn from one another. We are not to be a community where the leaders teach and the people listen. We are to be a community where everyone has something to contribute and everyone has something to learn.

*Group Discussion*

**Why do some people find it hard to listen/learn? And what might help them become better listeners/learners?**

**Why do some people find it hard to speak out/teach? And what might help them become better speakers/teachers?**

SOME IDEAS (if they are struggling)

*This is a challenge for everyone. Some people find it hard to listen, and have to grow in humility, in order to learn how to do this. Others find themselves afraid to speak up, and need to grow in courage.*

*To think of and give an example of finding one or either of these difficult would fit well here.*

*We need to be a community of mutual learners, humble enough to listen, and brave enough to speak.*

*4. Commit to the world v14*

The first 3 are all inward commitments – commitments to each other within the community. However, Paul reminds us that there is also a commitment which is outward facing – a commitment to the world.

In verse 14 he says, 'I am bound both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.'

He is saying that he has a commitment to the Gentile world, of every type: of different races (Greek and non-Greek); and different levels of education (wise and foolish).

The Christian community should never be primarily inward looking. We are community on a mission to the world – to make disciples of all nations.

### Group Discussion

**Can you think of ways in which Hope House fulfils this commitment to the world?**

**What else might we do to become better at this?**

SOME IDEAS (if they are struggling)

*Check out the HHC website for some of the community activities we are involved in. There are also less obvious ones, like we aim to create a welcoming, friendly atmosphere on a Sunday; we are committed to preparing ourselves for growth (hope insights, the shape of things plan, etc); we strive to have influence in the town, both as the church and the school.*

### 5. Commit to the gospel v15-17

Finally, we need to be committed to the gospel.

It is the gospel which gives power to our commitments. If we are committed to one another and to the world, but not to the gospel, we will not have anything of ultimate value to offer. Paul says, verse 16, that he is not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. It is the gospel that transforms our community from being a group of people who try to be nice to one another, and to those outside, into a community where things happen – where people are healed, inspired, transformed and made whole.

### Group Discussion

**What is it that we are offering to the world? What is this Good News?**

SOME IDEAS (if they are struggling)

*The possibility of a right relationship with God which changes everything. When people know God they are changed. Connecting Real People to a Real God in Real Life!*

### Prayer Time (15 mins)

Get the group to remember who it was they wrote on their piece of paper that they gave to Paul to bury in the wall. Explain what we did to anyone who missed that week etc. Ask each person in turn to say who they wrote, and then ask the whole group to pray at the same time for a minutes or two for those people to become Christians. TIP: keep an eye on the time so you can move on to the next person every minute or so. **Encourage the group to pray in tongues if they can** (if some people can't, make a mental note and talk to them about baptism in the spirit at some point in the next few weeks).

### Conclusion

So the Christian community should be characterised by commitment: commitment to one another – to thank God for each other, to pray for one another, to learn from one another. It should be characterised by a commitment to the world – always looking outwards. And it should be characterised by a commitment to the gospel which has the power to transform lives and societies by putting people right with God.

But in all these commitments we must remember that it all starts with God's commitment to us.

God is a God who makes commitments. He promises never to leave us or forsake us. He binds himself to us forever, never giving up on us even when we give up on him. He is utterly committed to us forever, and this is what enables us to commit to others.

*Recap on our series on Romans*

In this series we have been looking at a few themes from the letter to the Romans, We have looked at Identity – the importance of seeing ourselves as those who are loved by God. And we have looked at Commitment – the importance of sticking with one another – praying for one another, thanking God for one another. Tonight and next week, we are going to be looking at Hope.

*Icebreaker (5-10 mins)*

Take a large sheet of paper, and in the centre write the word 'Hope'. Around it draw a cloud (or thought bubbles/ sun). Then, ask each person to give a meaning for the word hope, and write in smaller clouds (thought bubbles/ at end of sun's rays). While you are doing this, talk about the meaning of these words. Save the sheet (for next week.)

**Read Romans 8:18-28 New Living Translation***The importance of hope*

The three theological virtues that Paul lists in 1 Corinthians 13 are Faith, Hope and Love. You cannot be a Christian without faith. You cannot be a Christian without love. And you cannot be a Christian without hope. Just as you can sum up Christianity with the words 'faith' or 'love' – you can also sum up Christianity with the word 'hope'.

*What is hope?*

There is a natural hope. Hope that things will turn out ok. Hope that the weather will get better. This is Hope as wishful thinking – hoping that things will turn out the way we want them to. But this is not Christian hope. Christian hope is holding onto a different reality.

In Romans 5:3-5 Paul says two things about hope which seem strange:

1. he says that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. The process starts with suffering and ends with hope. Paul is saying that hope comes via suffering. This seems to be the opposite of our experience. When things go wrong, when we get ill, or are disappointed, we *lose* hope.

Christian Hope is something supernatural, Christian Hope is something that comes in the midst of our suffering and pain. Worldly hope disappears in the midst of suffering. Christian hope emerges in the context of suffering.

2. perhaps even stranger, Paul concludes that 'hope does not disappoint us.' But hope seems to be exactly the thing that disappoints us.

Christian hope is confident hope. It does not disappoint. Paul keeps on repeating the phrase 'we know' in relation to hope.

*Hope in a person - not on circumstances v28 (10-15 mins)*

**Group Discussion:** How would you describe the hope you have in God to a not yet Christian friend of yours? (v. 28, hope in a person)

- Our hope is that God is at work. • This does not mean that we do not hope for things in this world – we hope for friends to become Christians, for healing, for the transformation of Barnsley, for the healing of society. • for example: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, are ordered to bow before the statue of the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar or else be thrown into a furnace. And this is what they say: 'If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.' • In other words they have hope that God will rescue them, but their hope is not dependent on being rescued. Their hope transcends circumstances, because it is based on a person

## Hope in an event - the Resurrection v29-30 (10-15 mins)

**Group Discussion:** Why is Jesus' death and resurrection so important to us?

*If they're struggling: Our hope is based on the resurrection of Jesus. During his earthly ministry Jesus preached a lot about love and faith, but never about hope. The reason is that hope comes from the resurrection. The resurrection shows us that the cross was not a defeat but a victory. It also shows that God can turn the worst things in the world into the best things. **This event, the resurrection of Jesus, is the source of our hope.** It gives us all the hope of resurrection – new life forever with God.*

### The Effects of Hope

#### 1. Hope gives us Perspective

One of the things that happens when we experience tragedies and disappointments is that we lose perspective. The first thing that hope does for us is transform our perspective. Paul says, in verse 18, 'I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.' In other words, hope has changed the way that he sees his suffering, because he sees them in the context of hope.

This does not mean that our sufferings are not real and painful. Paul knew what it was like to suffer. He was imprisoned, stoned, shipwrecked, flogged, hunted, sleep-deprived, overworked and rejected. But Paul sees all these things in the context of what is to come.

Whatever we go through, painful and confusing though it may be, must be seen from the perspective of what God has in store for us. The resurrection promises us that suffering or death do not have the final word.

God has incredible things in store for each one of us in this life and in the life to come.

Hope gives us an *eternal* perspective.

#### 2. Hope gives us Perseverance

The natural thing to do when things go wrong and we get hurt is to give up. However, Hope enables us to keep going. It stops us giving up. Isaiah says, '*Even youths grow tired and weary and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.*' (Isaiah 40:30-31) It gives us the perseverance we need to carry on. Father Raniero Cantalamessa, the preacher to the Pope's household, says that, 'to hope means to have faith that "this time" things will be different even if we have believed the same thing hundreds of times in vain.'

Hope gives us perspective and it gives us perseverance.

### Universal Hope (10-15 mins)

**Group Discussion:** We've looked at how our hope in the person, resurrection and affects our lives, but how does it affect our prayers for the people around us, and our church.

Encourage group to think about those we don't 'get on with' (Commitment part 1)

This is our hope: that God is working in every situation – in every tragedy, and disappointment, every success and every failure, in our work and our rest, in our relationships and in our thoughts and in our emotions to bring about good for us.

There is no part of our life, no situation that we face, and no part of the world where God is not at work to bring about good for us.

## *Hope and the Spirit v23*

Paul says, in verse 23 that 'we have the first fruits of the Spirit' which is what enables us to wait in hope for our redemption. Hope is a work of the Spirit, just like love and faith. This is really important when we think about hope – for hope needs guidance if it is to be genuine hope – for the Spirit shows us what we should hope for. Hope needs to be inspired by the Spirit.

## *Pray (10 mins)*

Ask if anyone is feeling short of hope for situations in their lives, and pray for the work of the Holy Spirit to increase hope in their situation.

### The Future Glory

18 Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. 19 For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. 20 Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, 21 the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. 22 For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us. 24 We were given this hope when we were saved. (If we already have something, we don't need to hope for it. 25 But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.)

26 And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. 27 And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will. 28 And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.

### Introduction

Last week, we considered that Christian hope is based on a person – it is hope in God; it is based on an event – the resurrection of Jesus; it is a Universal hope – that God is at work in *all things* to bring about good for those that love him; and it is a work of the Spirit – the Spirit works in our hearts to give us hope and guides our hopes.

This week we will be asking the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us as we look at how we can bring hope into our lives and into our town.

### Icebreaker (10-15 mins)

Take out the sheet produced last week, and look at the answers. In view of last week, would you change any of them?

### Hope transforms our Prayers

Paul says that 'we do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.'

In other words, we need the Spirit to inspire and inhabit our prayers. We need **hopeful prayers** – prayers which are inspired by the hope that God has given to us. *We need to pray with a vision of how things could be.*

We pray with hope for a town transformed by the love of God; for homelessness to be eradicated, community re-established, God's name honoured, the churches full, marriages restored, people healed, addicts set free and lives transformed. We need to do the same in our prayers for ourselves – to pray with hope for our marriages, our relationships, our work, our dreams.

### Prayer (20 mins for small group, 20 mins for whole group)

Get the group to break into 2s or 3s, encourage them to be open and discuss with the group areas of their life where they need HOPE.

Ask them to go into different parts of the house so that they can have a bit more privacy.

Explain that as a group they should write down what they talk and pray about, but without naming names. When they come back all the pieces of paper will be laid out, and as a whole group we will think about how we could take these topics and turn them into hopeful prayers for Barnsley.

## Conclusion

Hope is not at all natural, but this is what makes it so powerful.

According to G. K. Chesterton, the Christian virtues are the irrational virtues: 'Love means pardoning the unpardonable, or it is no virtue at all. Faith means believing the incredible, or it is no virtue at all. And hope means hoping when all is hopeless, or it is no virtue at all.'

Hope is indeed something wonderful, and it transforms our perspective on our lives and the world around us, it gives us perseverance in the midst of suffering and disappointment, and it transforms our prayers. No matter what we are facing we need to hold onto the hope that *'in all things God works for the good for those who love him and are called according to his purpose.'*

## SALVATION IS FOR EVERYONE

5 For Moses writes that the law's way of making a person right with God requires obedience to all of its commands. 6 But faith's way of getting right with God says, "Don't say in your heart, 'Who will go up to heaven?' (to bring Christ down to earth). 7 And don't say, 'Who will go down to the place of the dead?' (to bring Christ back to life again)." 8 In fact, it says, "The message is very close at hand; it is on your lips and in your heart." And that message is the very message about faith that we preach: 9 If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved. 11 As the Scriptures tell us, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced." 12 Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him. 13 For "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." 14 But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? 15 And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, "How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!"

*New Living Translation*

### Recap

We have looked at Identity – the importance of knowing who we are, Commitment – being a group utterly committed to each other, and Hope – people who never give up because we are full of hope. We'll now explore how thriving, inclusive communities can keep it real and simple: having INTEGRITY.

### Icebreaker:

**Prep 3 people before the night to play Would I Lie To You. They need to prepare & read a small statement (written by them) about something in their life. 2 people need to tell a lie, 1 the truth. The rest of the group can ask them questions to find out who is lying. The aim of the game for the 2 liars is to lie convincingly.**

### What is Integrity?

It means being consistent: inwardly and outwardly the same person.

It means being genuine and honest.

It means not faking it, being trustworthy and upright.

### The Importance of Integrity

Integrity is so important. We live in a society where there is a breakdown in trust. A recent MORI poll showed that 70% of people expect politician and those in government to not tell the truth, and even more expect journalists to lie. Even the police aren't immune (Hillsborough, Rotherham Child Sexual Exploitation). But integrity is vital for a community to flourish.

All relationships – marriage, friendship, relationships within work – are built on trust.

When Moses went to his father-in-law, Jethro for advice about how to lead the Israelites, Jethro advised him to delegate 'to men of integrity' Ex 18:21. The book of Proverbs says that those with integrity make better decisions.

Having integrity is better than having wealth. In Proverbs 28.6 it says, 'Better is the poor man who walks in his integrity, than he who is crooked, though he is rich.'

It is the basis of good leadership. And most importantly, integrity pleases God. David says, 'I know my God that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity' 1Chron 29:17.

If we want to be a healthy and effective community we are going to need integrity, and this will mean doing three things: keeping it real, keeping it simple, and keeping it equal. These are the three things that Paul encourages the community in Rome to do in Romans 10.5-15.

### Do People Trust Their Spiritual Leaders?

## 1. Keeping it real (20 mins)

We find the key to integrity in verse 9: 'If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.'

Being a Christian means confessing what we believe, and believing what we confess.

This is the key to integrity – where what we say matches what we believe. It means living without pretence, without faking it. It means being inwardly and outwardly the same. It means saying when we mess up, when we struggle with things, and when we don't understand. It means having our lives, our words and our hearts all aligned. It means being authentic; it means keeping it real.

### *Believing what we Say & Saying what we Believe*

Having integrity means ensuring that we are not just a Christian outwardly.

**Group Discussion: what's the difference between being a Christian Inwardly and being one Outwardly.**

Hints (if they're struggling): Being a Christian is not about just going to church, singing the songs, saying the right things. It is about our hearts. Why do we find ourselves hiding things we're ashamed of, pretending to be better or more intelligent, or more popular than we are?

**Summarise:** having integrity as a Christian means both saying what we believe and believing what we say. If we say what we don't believe we are hypocrites, and if we believe but don't speak about it, we are cowards. We need to do both – to ensure that our outsides match our insides.

## 2. Keeping it Simple (20 mins)

The second way that we grow in integrity as Christians is by keeping it simple. Paul starts this section (verses 5-8) by quoting from Deuteronomy 30.

It's quite hard to understand these verses without looking at what Moses was saying in the Deuteronomy 30 as a whole. The Israelites are about to enter the promised land, and Moses has just spent about 25 chapters reminding the Israelites of what the Law is. Then in chapter 30 he tells them that despite the fact that it has taken 25 chapters to go through, the law is really quite simple. Moses is saying that it's simple really, so don't overcomplicate it.

### *It's simple*

Here Paul makes the same point that Moses has made. We have just had nine chapters of complicated teaching about what Jesus has achieved through his death and resurrection. But now he says, 'Don't over complicate things. It's actually very simple.' He is saying that 'the righteousness that is by faith' -which means having a life lived in relationship with God -is very straightforward. It is simply this: verse 9: 'If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.'

Having integrity as a Christian means keeping your faith really simple. It means being undivided and uncomplicated. It means being the same all the way through us. It means having our whole lives under the lordship of Jesus.

John Stott put it like this: 'When Jesus is Lord of our beliefs, opinions, ambitions, standards, values and lifestyle, then we are integrated Christians; then integrity marks our life. Only when he is Lord do we become whole.'

We need to keep it simple, but not simplistic. It is important to grow in understanding and learning. But we shouldn't complicate our faith. If you want to have integrity, then keep it simple.

**Testimony:** can anyone give us some examples of when they have 'kept it simple'? Or when they have been helped by someone else 'keeping it simple'.

### *Prayer: (10 mins)*

Encourage the group to ask God to give them opportunities to talk to people about their faith this week, keeping it simple of course. Perhaps the person whose name is on piece of paper in the wall!

## SALVATION IS FOR EVERYONE

5 For Moses writes that the law's way of making a person right with God requires obedience to all of its commands. 6 But faith's way of getting right with God says, "Don't say in your heart, 'Who will go up to heaven?' (to bring Christ down to earth). 7 And don't say, 'Who will go down to the place of the dead?' (to bring Christ back to life again)." 8 In fact, it says, "The message is very close at hand; it is on your lips and in your heart." And that message is the very message about faith that we preach: 9 If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved. 11 As the Scriptures tell us, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced." 12 Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him. 13 For "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." 14 But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? 15 And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, "How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!"

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### Icebreaker: (10 mins)

how did you get on, did God answer your prayers, did you talk to someone about your faith?

### 3. Keep it Equal (15 mins)

So integrity means keeping it real, keeping it simple and thirdly, having integrity means keeping it equal.

Paul writes, verse 12, 'For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who come to him.'

God treats all people equally, whether they are Jews or Gentiles, men or women, young or old. This makes Christianity a source of equality for it teaches that every single person is equally in need of a saviour, and every single person is equally able to be saved. God treats us equally, and having integrity means treating other people equally.

### Group Discussion

**Think back to the sessions on commitment, where we were looking at thanking God for people who we naturally find difficult to get along with. Do we treat them equally, if not why not? How can we learn to treat them equally?**

Integrity is ensuring that we don't live lives in compartments, being one thing to one person, and another to others – being one person at church and another at work; one person with friends and another with family.

Having integrity is about being the same in every area of life, undivided and consistent. Having integrity is about treating people the same, whether they are rich or poor, famous, homeless, attractive or irritating.

## 4. Evangelism and Integrity (15 mins)

Paul finishes this section by talking about the necessity of evangelism – telling people about the good news of Jesus.

He asks, ‘How will anyone ever know about Jesus unless we tell them?’

And the key to telling people about Jesus is integrity.

We don’t need to pretend that we know more than we do.

We don’t need to pretend that we have the answers for everything.

We can say we don’t know or we don’t understand things.

We don’t have to pretend that we are better people than we are, that we don’t struggle with things, or mess up, or have things about which we are ashamed.

All we have to do is ask people to come and see what we do.

Evangelism is simply about sharing our lives with other people – telling them what Jesus has done for us, and inviting them to come and see. It is about being transparent with those around us, treating people equally, and being consistent in every area of our lives.

This has an effect on those around us.

### **Is HHC honest in its evangelism?**

We are deliberately non-religious (we do present wrapping, mother’s day, Easter eggs, party in the park – rather than outdoor evangelism, door knocking, etc)

### *Conclusion: Don’t keep it to yourself*

So integrity is about keeping it real, ensuring that our hearts are in line with how we appear, keeping it simple, being straightforward in our faith, and keeping it equal, treating all people the same no matter who they are.

This kind of integrity is the key to the spread of Christianity.

### *Prayer (20 mins)*

Why not come to God in prayer and ask him to show you where you’re lacking in integrity?

Think back over the last 24 hours – can you say that you were upright, consistent and truthful? Ask God to show you where you missed the mark. You’ll find that God brings to mind the times when you’ve twisted the truth, or lacked consistency, or not stood firm.

Talk to God about those times, and say sorry. Ask God to help you to change.

## HUMILITY 1 ROMANS 12:1-8

### A LIVING SACRIFICE TO GOD

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. <sup>2</sup> Don't copy the behaviour and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. <sup>3</sup> Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us. <sup>4</sup> Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, <sup>5</sup> so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.

<sup>6</sup> In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. <sup>7</sup> If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. <sup>8</sup> If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.

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We have looked at

**Identity** – the importance of knowing who we are,

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Now we'll talk about how we should respond to what God has done -what we should do 'in view of God's mercy.'

### Introduction

Paul starts this section with the word 'therefore,' because what he is going to say is the consequence of the argument so far. Paul has spent 11 chapters on what God has done for us – how despite our failings, Jesus died in our place, demonstrated his love for us, and poured his love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Now he is about to talk about how we should respond to what God has done -what we should do 'in view of God's mercy.'

### Humility

As C. S. Lewis put it, 'Humility is thinking less about yourself, not thinking less of yourself.'

People used different titles for Jesus in the gospels. He was called 'Rabbi', which means teacher. He was called 'Messiah' or 'Christ' which means he was God's anointed one. He was called 'Lord' which means 'leader' or 'boss'. But the title which Jesus gave himself most often is 'Son of Man'. In Mark's gospel that phrase is used more than 40 times. Why do you think Jesus used this title for himself more than any other? Because it was Jesus' way identifying himself with very ordinary people - people like you and me. Son of Man was a common phrase of the day. It was a way of saying: 'I'm one of you. I'm for you.'

When you think of who Jesus actually is, it's a phrase full of humility. Jesus is the Son of God and yet he left his throne in heaven to come to earth to live among us. John 1:14 says 'The Word (that's Jesus) became flesh and blood and moved in to the neighbourhood.' Philippians 2:6-7 said that Jesus was equal with God but didn't want to use that to his own advantage, so came to live on earth, fully human and fully divine. Jesus is our great example of humility and if he was willing to humble himself then we must be willing to do the same.

**Group Discussion: So what does 'humbling ourselves' look like?**

## 1. Humility transforms our relationship with God

First, Humility transforms our relationship with God, enabling us to worship him and to be obedient to him. Paul says, 'Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God -this is your spiritual act of worship.'

Worship is the fundamental attitude of the Christian to God, giving God all the glory and offering all of ourselves (our minds, our emotions, our bodies, our songs, our relationships, our work, our rest) to him. But worship is only possible if we have humility. Sometimes we find it difficult to worship when because we are absorbed in our thoughts and worries. This is a lack of humility – for we are considering our concerns to be more important than God's glory.

Pride means being self-absorbed, but humility enables us to look outwards. Humility moves us from being focussed on ourselves to being focussed on God – and this is what enables our lives to become characterised by worship. Paul goes on to say, that having a humble attitude will mean that we 'will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.'

Humility not only helps us to worship; it also enables us to be obedient. The reason we often find it difficult to obey God and do what he wants is that we put our will and desires above his. This is a lack of humility.

Humility means considering God's will for our lives and his desires for us to be more important than our own desires and wills – and it is this which enables us to be obedient.

Humility is vital for our relationship with God as it enables us to worship him and be obedient to him.

**Group Discussion: With humility comes the ability to be honest about our failings, so that we don't have to hide anything or boast about anything. What kind of things do people hide from others?**

## 2. Humility transforms our relationship with ourselves

Secondly, humility transforms our relationship with ourselves.

Paul says, 'Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself in sober judgement.'

Humility is the key to having good self-understanding. It is easy to delude ourselves – telling ourselves that we are better or more popular than we are, or that we are worse than we are.

Pride encourages us to believe that we are more important than we are; humility enables us to get the right perspective on ourselves.

We should see ourselves as people who are created by God, and in the creation stories God looks on humans and says that they are very good.

But we are also fallen – we are not what we could be. Our desires, our emotions, our wills, our bodies, our appetites are all corrupted, and so we have made bad decisions and there are things in us which are not as God would like.

Humility enables us to recognise our created goodness, but also be honest about our weaknesses.

Without humility we try to pretend that we are better than we are, hiding our faults and promoting our successes.

**Group Discussion: Is anyone brave enough to talk about one of their weaknesses?**

### *Prayer*

Spend a few moments thinking about the journey Jesus came on so that we could know him, from sitting on a throne at God's right hand to being born among farm animals as a human baby. Thank him for his willingness to come to our world in humility.

Spend some time reminding yourself of how much God loves you. You belong to him, and you're precious to him. Ask God to give you a secure identity in him so that you don't need to depend on anything else to make yourself feel important.

Ask God to help you to be humble. Talk to him about specific situations where you might find this difficult.

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And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. <sup>2</sup> Don't copy the behaviour and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. <sup>3</sup> Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us. <sup>4</sup> Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, <sup>5</sup> so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.

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Last time we looked at how Humility transforms our relationship with God and how Humility transforms our relationship with ourselves.

### 3. Humility transforms our relationships within the Church

Paul moves on from describing how humility affects our self-understanding, to looking at how it affects relationships within the Christian community. Humility encourages us to see ourselves as part of a community, in which we all have different parts. Pride encourages us to think we can do everything ourselves – that we don't need other people.

Humility recognises that we all need each other. Paul is saying that we all have our gifts, and we need to recognise our own, and then do our part. For some it is prophesying, for some it is serving, for others it is teaching or leadership, or encouragement, or generosity, or mercy (which probably refers to serving the poor).

But for Paul the key is to hold our gifts humbly. This means that we recognise what our gift is, and not try to be something we are not.

We need to recognise our gifts are gifts, things we have received from God, rather than have earned or have by right. And notice that there does not seem to be a hierarchy of gifts – some gifts don't seem to be more important than others – they are all important.

The three adjectives that Paul uses for the use of our gifts are 'generously, diligently, and cheerfully'. These are all characteristics of humility.

**Generosity** means giving as much as we can, because we consider the needs of other more important than our own.

**Diligence** means never giving up on our tasks for one another, keeping their good always in mind.

**Cheerfully** means considering it a huge privilege to be able to serve one another.

**Groups Discussion: how does humility have an effect on our relationships within Hope House?**

## 4. Humility transforms our relationship with the world

Paul says, in verse 2, that we should not conform to the patterns of this world – we should be distinctive. And he says that we should be transformed by the renewing of our minds – we should have a different perspective, a different way of thinking. Paul will soon talk about our distinctive love that we should have for each other, but the first way that we should be distinctive is our humility. Humility is incredibly counter-cultural.

At the time when Paul was writing this - the Greek philosophers condemned humility as a negative concept. They respected justice, truth and other virtues, but they saw no good in humility. It is similar today.

We live in a world where success and prominence are the aim. The majority of school aged children, when asked what they want to be when they grow up, answer, 'A celebrity.' Humility is one of the primary ways that we can be counter-cultural.

When we turn down promotion, or choose a job paying less, in order to do something we believe in more, when we are honest about our failings and modest about our successes, when we look to hang out with people at the bottom of society or on the edge, rather than the people at the top, people notice.

Humility is not just a counter-cultural way of living, it is also incredibly effective in the way that we work and have relationships with one another.

**Group Discussion: how does humility have an effect on our relationships outside Hope House (i.e. work, family, friends)? Do you think Hope House shows humility in its relationships with others e.g. local community, council, other churches, businesses? What about the school – relationships with families, local authority, staff, etc**

**Do you think we are counter-cultural?**

## Conclusion

Humility will be a vital virtue that we will need to have if we are going to be the kind of community that God is calling us to be in Barnsley for humility transforms our relationship with God, with ourselves, with one another, and with the world.

How do we become more humble? It is something we do, and something that God does. When the Bible talks about humility it often comes in the form of a command:

In 2 Chronicles 7.14 God says to Israel, 'if my people, who are called by my name, will **humble** themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.'

It is something we do – we humble ourselves.

And we humble ourselves by worshipping God, putting ourselves below him, by acknowledging our weaknesses to ourselves and to each other, by serving God and one another, choosing to do all the least glamorous tasks.

It is something we do, but it is also something that God does. It is a work of the Holy Spirit.

It is one of the things that you notice often when people become Christians – they have a new recognition of their weakness, and a new desire to serve one another.

## Prayer

Pray that God would fill us with a spirit of humility – that we might draw closer to God, know ourselves better, love one another more fully, and have a greater impact on the world.