

DISCUSSION GUIDE :: WEEK 4

STOP, COLLABORATE & LISTEN
HOW GOD MAKES A MIX-TAPE
JOHN 3:16; EPHESIANS 4:20-24; ROMANS 12:1-2
10/01/2017



MAIN POINT

If God were to create a mix-tape for me, what would He say on it?

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Before the days of streaming music online, many of us had the pleasure of buying or borrowing cassette tapes and using a dual-deck stereo system to put our favorite songs from all the tapes onto one "mix-tape." Perhaps you did the same thing later with a CD burner. Do you recall making a "mix" at an earlier age? What were some of your favorite kinds of "mixes" to make?

Did you ever make a mix for someone else? Why did you choose the songs you chose? How did they receive it?

Music mixes are a reflection of our favorites if we made them for ourselves, but sometimes we make mixes for someone else. We work to choose songs that we like but also think they will like, and we also choose songs that we believe they will like even if we don't. Yet other times we choose songs for them to send them a message about our thoughts or feelings toward them. It's not an unhelpful metaphor for thinking about the stories of the Bible. In a very real sense, the Bible can be understood as a "mix-tape," and its messages are clear: He loves us and has a plan for our lives.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A COUPLE OF VOLUNTEERS READ THE FOLLOWING PASSAGES: JOHN 3:16 AND ROMANS 5:8

What do these verses reveal about the nature of God's love for us?

Compare and contrast God's love with the way we typically talk about love as human beings.

God's love for us is far more costly and gracious than we can ever truly know. God has gone to great lengths, even to the point of the sacrificial death of His Son, to show His love for us. His love is neither sentimental nor sappy. It is not a mere expression, but a tangible act that draws us to Him and shows just how deep God's love truly is. No wonder Paul, in Ephesians 3:18, prayed that all God's children could come to understand more how wide, long, high and deep was the love of God! Yet God's amazing love for us is not the only thing declared on his "mix-tape."

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 4:20-24.

Paul calls for and speaks about the transformation that takes place in a Christian. Where does transformation start for a believer?

What does it look like to "put off your old self" and "put on your new self"?

What things might be hardest for you to "put off" and "put on"? Why?

Paul wanted his first readers (and us!) to know that to be loved by God is to be transformed by God. His love for us has an impact on us. It changes us and our purpose. In the same way that adopting a new identity would also change your behavior, so being loved by God changes our actions. But merely to stop practicing a former way of life is not enough. Life in Christ is about new life, God's quality of life. It's an ongoing process in which Christ is continually making us new in the attitude of our minds. In Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, God is always working to make us into the person He wants us to be to do the things He has called us to do. So God loves us, and He is working in us for His good purposes. The question is, "Will we live as if this is true?"

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 12:1-2.

Paul describes God's will for us as good, pleasing and perfect (NLT). Does His will always seem this way? Why or why not?

What evidence can people see that God is at work transforming you? Why is it important for Christians to stand out from the rest of the world?

To be transformed is to effectively start over with a "blank tape." When is it easy and joyful to accept and embrace God's transforming work, and when is it painful and frustrating?

Transformation is an appealing word, but it is often a painful process. To put off our old selves and embrace the new is to say "goodbye" to a lot of things that meant a lot to us for a long time. As we are transformed, we will no longer "fit in" with folks that were once very easy for us to "fit in" with. But God's will is that we would become new people who daily sacrifice our lives to follow His will, not our own or that of others. Living this way comes from God and His changing our minds and hearts from the old self into a new being who gives everything to Him.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What is the main takeaway or point of application for you from today's discussion?

How have your actions, attitudes, and thoughts changed since God began His transforming work in your life? How does it need to change this week?

In what ways does godly community play a part in helping us rely on God and trust His transforming work?

What responsibility do we have to one another, and how can we live that out?

PRAY

Finish your time in prayer, asking God to reveal more and more His great love for you, and to be constantly transforming you and your group. Pray that He would reveal places in your lives to put off the old self and put on the new self.

COMMENTARY

JOHN 3:16

3:16. Eternal life comes not because of anything we do. Salvation comes as a free gift when we believe what God has said. "Whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." Four times in three verses (vv. 16-18) Jesus uses variations of the word "believe," perhaps the most important key word in John's Gospel. Jesus classified the entire human race into two groups—those who believe and are not condemned, and those who do not believe and are condemned already. The gospel begins with God's love, continues through the cross and the empty tomb, and results in eternal life for those who believe. The verb "perish" speaks of eternal death in contrast to eternal life. It represents the opposite of preservation, since death is the opposite of life. Those who refuse God's gift are alienated from Him without hope for both the present and the future.

EPHESIANS 4:20-24

4:20-21. If part of the problem nonbelievers have is intellectual, then part of the solution is for their minds to be enlightened with truth. Christian discipleship includes replacing bad information with the biblical teachings that you "learned ... heard ... and were taught." The truth that the Ephesians had embraced was not abstract; it was personal. It focused on "the Messiah." They came to understand that Jesus was their final Teacher, speaking as it were through human teachers. Not only was the Lord Jesus the topic of their learning, but also He was the "location" in which the teaching occurred ("in Jesus"). Such teaching leads to ultimate truth. Once people accept that the truth is in Jesus—who is Himself "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6)—they are well on their way to a Christian lifestyle.

4:22. Paul was describing changes that God brought about at the time of a believer's conversion (you took off your former way of life ... "you are being renewed" ... "you put on the new man"). The "old man" refers to the sinful self that we were before we were saved. This is the behavior described in 2:1-3 and 4:17-19, summarized by the phrase "corrupted by deceitful desires."

4:23. Saved persons have intentionally laid aside their old self and put on the new self. As a result their minds are being renewed. (Notice again the emphasis on the relationship between our minds and our morals.) This process is something God Himself accomplishes, for the renewal is done to us. Once we embrace that the truth is in Jesus (4:21), then we are in a position for the Spirit to give us an attitude (spirit) in our minds that will result in a lifestyle different than we had before.

4:24. If at conversion we deliberately took off our old way of living, then when we believed we also put on the new man. Paul was referring to the new creation that we became at conversion (2 Cor. 5:17). The only other place Paul used the exact phrase translated new man is Ephesians 2:15, a reference to the entire church as the "new man" that God has created from two formerly alienated groups—Jews and Gentiles. If it took a miracle for God to create the "new man," the church, it also took a miracle for Him to take the old corrupted selves we used to be and make us brand new. The nature of the new man is according to God's likeness. Mankind in the beginning was created in God's image, which sin marred. Now in salvation, with new life created by God, we can grow in becoming like Him morally. Paul specified this by naming two such qualities: righteousness (acting right toward our fellow humans) and purity (holiness, acting right toward God).

ROMANS 12:1-2

12:1. Paul urged all believers to present themselves as a "living sacrifice." Such language must have clashed immediately in the minds of many. The common understanding was that only the first and best animals were fit to be offered as sacrifices. The

sacrifice Paul had in mind was radically different. Jesus had given Himself as the once-and-for-all Sacrifice for sin on the cross. Believers thus were to live in light of Jesus' all-sufficient sacrifice, bringing glory to God. The idea of Christians' presenting their "bodies" as a living sacrifice harked back to the discussion of the body being dead to sin because of the life-giving presence of the Spirit (see 8:10). To live by the Spirit is to offer oneself completely and daily as a "holy and pleasing sacrifice." Paul further explained that living as a holy, pleasing sacrifice was a believer's "spiritual worship." The word rendered spiritual also can be understood as meaning logical or reasonable. The Greek word translated worship often was used to refer to carrying out religious duties or services. Thus Paul taught that in light of God's gracious redemption (by the mercies of God), living as a sacrifice was the logical and pleasing way for Christians to serve God.

12:2. As Christians, we're also to please God with our minds. The temptation is to go along with the dominant attitudes of the "age," to adopt the prevailing cultural worldview characterized by self-worship (sin). The apostle urged his readers to reject worldliness and "to be transformed by the renewing of the mind."

The phrase be transformed in the Greek is a present passive imperative form. This form suggests three important truths. First, the present tense describes a continuing action. Transformation of our thinking and attitudes is an ongoing, lifelong endeavor. Second, the passive voice indicates that the indwelling Spirit is the Source of our transformation. We can't transform ourselves but rather must be transformed. Third, however, is the truth suggested by the imperative that we must consciously place ourselves at the Spirit's disposal for transformation to happen. The Spirit will not transform us against our will.

The result of having our minds renewed by the Spirit is to grow in our ability "to discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God." The word translated "discern" literally means to prove by testing. Christian living is not about emptying the mind—as some religions claim—but rather about thinking intelligently and logically in accordance with God's ways. God wants His people to know what pleases Him because by living according to His ways we will experience the most abundant life possible (see John 10:10).