

Facilitator Notes for *Set Free!* – A Study in Romans
Lesson 15 ~ Cure for a Hard Heart Romans 11

**PLEASE DON'T READ THESE NOTES UNTIL YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR LESSON.
HEARING GOD FOR YOURSELF IS WAY BETTER THAN MY COMMENTS!**

Questions

Read **Romans 11:1-10**.

1. From what Paul has said so far in **Romans 9** and **10**, one might come to the conclusion that God has rejected his chosen people, the Jews. What is Paul's number one piece of evidence that God has not rejected the Jews (**11:1**)?

God had not rejected Paul and Paul was a Jew – a descendant of Abraham and a member of the tribe of Benjamin. Paul, before he was saved, was a Jew's Jew – the cream of the crop.

- ♥ Have you ever felt rejected by God? Why? Have you ever rejected God? What happened?
 - ♥ What are the chances that God will ever reject his chosen people (**Jeremiah 31:35-37**)? **God is as likely to reject his people as he is likely to do away with the laws of nature. God won't even consider casting his people off, even though they have sinned against him.** Even if you are a Gentile Christian, what can be personally significant about this promise? **For Jew or Gentile, God always keeps his promises and he is always faithful to us, even when we are not faithful to him. Those who belong to God will belong to him forever.**
2. What is Paul's second piece of evidence proving that God has not rejected his people (**11:2-5**)? **Paul is showing that even when the nation of Israel turned against him as a whole, he has ALWAYS kept a remnant of his people for himself. This was true in the time of Elijah after he had the show-down on the mountain with the prophets of Baal. Elijah ran for his life and then cried out to God saying he was the only believer left! God told him that there were 7000 faithful Jews who had not bent their knee to Baal.**
Paul goes on to say that it was the same in his day. Not all Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah. Many did believe and became Christ-followers.
 - ♥ What is a remnant (**11:5 NIV**)? **A remnant is a small group who has remained faithful when the larger group has fallen away or into idolatry.** Who was the remnant in Elijah's day (**11:4**)? **The 7000 Jews that had not worshipped the false god Baal.** In Paul's day (**11:5**)? **Those Jews who did accept Jesus as their Savior from sin by faith.** What is Paul's point in mentioning these remnants? **The Jewish believers in this faithful remnant are proof that God has not rejected his people.** (Elijah's story is found in **1 Kings 18:16-19:18**.)
 - ♥ What is the cause of faith for the believing remnant (**11:5-6**)? **The remnant is saved by God's grace.** Why is this important? **They did not earn their way to God by works – God chose them in his grace and they came by faith.**
 - ♥ If the only information you had to go on was **11:5-6**, how would you define or explain God's *grace*? **Grace is kindness from God and is a gift from God and can't be earned.** Why can't grace and merit (earning our way) co-exist (**11:6**)? **God's kindness and mercy cannot be earned. It can only be a gift. If one tries to earn it or deserve it, it is no longer grace.**
 3. **What** were most of the Jewish people earnestly seeking and **how** were they seeking it (**11:6-7; 9:30-32**)? **The Jewish people were seeking righteousness or a right standing before God – but they were seeking this right standing by works – keeping the law and commandments.**
 - ♥ How is it possible for someone to try so hard to please God that they actually resist him and miss what he has planned? Have you ever seen this happen? What was the result?
 - ♥ In your opinion, are most churchgoers today relying more on performance of rituals or on God's grace?

4. What does God do to people who insist on coming to God their own way (11:7-10)? Do you think this is fair? Why or why not?

If we continue to insist on coming to God in our own way, trying to earn his favor with works, God will eventually harden our hearts so that we can no longer see or understand the things of God.

- ♥ From what Paul says in 11:7-9, how would you define **hardened** in your own words?
- ♥ **Why** do you think God hardens or blinds the heart that is persistently resistant to him so that it can no longer see or understand God's truths?
- ♥ What personal warning do you see in 11:7-9? How will you heed the warning?

Stubborn, willful resistance to the will of God will result in a *hardened heart*. Resisting God is like saying, "Leave me alone; I will do it my way." If this attitude goes on long enough (and only God knows the "tipping point"), God will make a person hardened to him and his truth. The Greek word for *hardening* is a medical term that refers to the tough bone fibers that grow around a fracture. Hardening is like a **callus of the heart** where repeated resistance to God will yield an **actual inability to understand and respond** to what God is saying. Insensitivity and lack of repentance are warning signs of **hardening**. As the heat of the sun hardens clay but softens wax, so the light of God's truth hardens those who resist God but softens those who are responsive to him. God does not immediately react to our first sin or even many sins. Instead, he offers kindness in hopes that we will repent from our wrong attitudes and actions. Our response is the key; we dare not let those things continue that may lead to a **hardened heart**.

5. From the following examples in scripture, what **actions** and **attitudes** should be avoided because they may lead to a *hardness of the heart*?

Example from scripture	Action or attitude to be avoided
Exodus 8:19; 9:34-35	continual refusal to listen to God or to acknowledge the truth that God makes plain
Deuteronomy 8:6-14	forget God and his good gifts during times of prosperity; pride in what you claim to have accomplished, forgetting that the good things are gifts from God.
Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95:7-8	quarreling and complaining during hard times – putting God to the test by questioning his goodness and faithfulness to his promises.
Proverbs 29:1	stubbornly refusing to accept correction from others – refusing to repent and change
Zechariah 7:11-13	refuse to listen and hear what the Spirit is saying through God's Word

- ♥ What actions and attitudes described above are you most susceptible to? Why? What is the best remedy for hardness of the heart?
- ♥ Are you aware of any of these actions or attitudes in your own life right now? If so, what will you do about it?

Read **Romans 11:11-24**.

6. How has God used Israel's rejection of salvation and what will be the final outcome (11:11-12)?
God used the Jews rejection of salvation through Jesus as an opportunity to extend this salvation to the Gentiles. The final outcome will be that the Jews will become jealous of the relationship the Gentiles have with God and they will finally accept salvation.

- ♥ Paul describes a chain of events in 11:11-12: 1) Israel (as a whole) rejects salvation through Christ; 2) the Gentiles accept what the Jews rejected; and 3) The Jews become envious of the blessings of the Gentiles and finally accept God's salvation through Christ. Which of the events has already happened for which are we still waiting? **Number 3 has not happened yet.** What will, do you imagine, the fulfillment of these events to look like?
- ♥ In what way would the salvation of the Gentiles cause envy in Israel (11:11, 13-14)? **Both the news that salvation is in Christ and that God accepted pagan Gentiles serves to provoke Israel to jealousy. Israel forgot that God's intention was to bless all nations and all people through**

Abraham, not just the Jewish nation. Of what, specifically, might they be envious? **Perhaps God's blessing and also intimacy with God.** How could this envy or jealousy cause them to turn to Christ?

- ♥ When someone receives God's blessing and grace in their life, does that spur you on to seek God all the more, or does it leave you feeling on the short end of the stick? Why?
7. Paul uses an analogy of an olive tree (**11:16-24**) to explain the relationship between Jews and Christian Gentiles. The *olive tree*, cultivated in groves or orchards throughout Palestine, was an accepted emblem of Israel (**Jeremiah 11:16; Hosea 14:4-6**). What does each part of the analogy listed below symbolize?

Cultivated olive tree/olive tree roots - The church or the children of God – the Jewish people were the roots or first growth of this tree; the people of God is based on their heritage

The wild olive tree/ olive tree "shoot" - in place of the broken off branches, the Gentiles have been grafted into the tree becoming part of the people of God

The "branches" which have been broken off - The Jewish people who have rejected God and have been broken off from the tree (family)

The "branches" that have been grafted in - the Jewish people who will come back to God by faith in Jesus and will be grafted back into the tree

8. In order to follow Paul's analogy and reasoning, summarize in your own words the main point(s) in each of the following verses.

Verse	Main Point(s)
11:17	Some Jews have been broken off; Gentiles grafted in and receive the blessing promised to Abraham and his descendents
11:18	Gentiles are not to become proud about being grafted in and taking the place of God's chosen people; Even though grafted in, Gentiles are not "roots"
11:19	Some Gentiles may become proud thinking the Jews were cut off to make room for the "special" Gentiles
11:20	Warning Gentiles against pride and arrogance; reminder that we come to God by faith
11:21	If the Jews could be broken off because unbelief, than so can the Gentiles (because of pride)
11:22	God is both kind and stern depending on how we respond to him
11:23	If the Jews turn back from the unbelief, God will graft them back into the family of God
11:24	If God was willing to graft in "wild" branches into the tree, just think how eager he will be to graft back in the "natural" branches!

- ♥ For what reasons could a Christian Gentile be tempted to feel superior to a Jew? How might a Christian today feel superior to a non-Christian? Why are these comparisons foolish and wrong?
- ♥ What two qualities of God are mentioned in **11:22**? Which one of these qualities are you likely to emphasize over the other? Why? What decides which attitude God has toward you?
- ♥ Read **Galatians 3:28** and **Ephesians 2:11-22**. Someday, what will be the relationship between Christian Jews and Gentiles? **Someday, there will be no distinction between Jew and Gentile (or any other groups); all will be one in Christ.** God has broken down the wall of hostility that once separated Jews and Gentiles. We all are new creations in Christ and all part of one Body in which God lives by his Spirit. How can you prepare for this day? How can you help make it a reality now? It is important we work against divisions in the Body of Christ – whether it be between Jews or Gentiles (not usually a problem for us today) or divisions of denomination, race, economic status, nationality, etc. We are all ONE IN CHRIST and no part of the Body is more important or more loved than another part.

Read **Romans 11:25-36**.

9. A *mystery*, in the Bible, refers to something that was formerly hidden or obscure, but is now revealed by God so that it can be known and understood by all. What is the **mystery** that Paul wants his readers to understand (11:25-27)?

The mystery is that God is using the hardness of the Jews to include the Gentiles into the family of God. This was God's plan all along – just as it is his plan to bring the Jews (as a whole) back into the family of God. When the "complete" number of Gentiles has been added, great numbers of Jews will come back to God and accept Jesus as their Savior.

- ♥ What might be one indication that the “full number of Gentiles” coming to Christ (11:25) is close to completion (Matthew 28:19-20; 24:14 and Mark 13:10)? Some Bible scholars believe that when the gospel reaches all nations (people groups) on earth, the time of the Gentiles will be "complete." The Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20) specifically commands that we take the good news of Jesus to all nations. Revelation 5:9 talks about the worship in heaven that will be given to Jesus; it says: And they sang a new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood **you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation**.”
- ♥ Do you expect to see to see the fulfillment of 11:25-27 in your lifetime? Why or why not? What difference does it make if we are close to the fulfillment of these events? **We will not have forever to fulfill the Great Commission; we must share the good news while there is time.** Is there any way to know when this time will come? **Jesus said that only the Father knows when this time will come** Why or why not?

10. For what reasons will Israel someday be saved (11:28-29)?

God's gifts and call are irrevocable – can never be withdrawn. The Jewish people will always be his chosen people. The Jews will someday be saved because of God's mercy, just as the Gentiles were saved. We all are dependent on God's mercy.

- ♥ When Paul says in 11:26 that “*all* Israel will be saved,” does he mean that every individual Jew will come to Christ at that time? **No – it just means the majority will be saved** Why or why not? **Salvation is always an individual choice and each person must choose; not all will choose to believe**
- ♥ What does 11:29 mean to you if you apply it personally? What are the implications of this statement for you? How does it make you feel towards God? Yourself?
- ♥ God's gifts and call are irrevocable (can never be withdrawn). Does this mean that his gifts and call can't be rejected? **God is always faithful to his promises, but we can and do reject him** Why or why not?

11. According to 11:30-32, what experience will both Jews and Gentiles undergo?

We all were rebels against God and we all are recipients of God's mercy; we come to God only because of his grace and mercy. No one deserves their place in God's family and no one can earn it with good works. We all messed up and we all are dependent on God's kindness and mercy.

- ♥ Why does Paul consider disobedience a **binding** or **imprisonment** (11:32)? **This is what disobedience and rejection of God does to our hearts – it binds or imprisons us in our sins and only God can break this bondage.** How has this been true in your life? How has God's mercy set you free?
- ♥ **Romans 11:33-36** is a *doxology* – an expression or hymn of praise to God. Why do you think Paul placed this hymn of praise at this point in his letter to the Romans? **Paul has been discussing some pretty remarkable stuff and revealing the mystery of the Jews and Gentiles that was not known or understood before. After he lays it all out and we see God's wonderful plan from start to finish, Paul cannot help but pause and say how incredible and awesome God is!**

BELOW IS THE SUPPLEMENTARY SCRIPTURE FOR THIS LESSON THAT CAN BE PRINTED OUT FOR SMALL GROUP TIME

NIV

Jeremiah 31:35-37 This is what the LORD says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the LORD Almighty is his name: **36** “Only if these decrees vanish from my sight,” declares the LORD, “will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before me.” **37** This is what the LORD says: “Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done,” declares the LORD.

Exodus 8:19 The magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” But Pharaoh’s heart was hard and he would not listen, just as the LORD had said.

Exodus 9:34 When Pharaoh saw that the rain and hail and thunder had stopped, he sinned again: He and his officials hardened their hearts. **35** So Pharaoh’s heart was hard and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the LORD had said through Moses.

Deuteronomy 8:6-14 Observe the commands of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and revering him. **7** For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; **8** a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; **9** a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills. **10** When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. **11** Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. **12** Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, **13** and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, **14** then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

Exodus 17:1-7 The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. **2** So they quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.” Moses replied, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?”

3 But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?” **4** Then Moses cried out to the LORD, “What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.” **5** The LORD answered Moses, “Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. **6** I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink.” So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. **7** And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

Psalms 95:7-8 for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Today, if you hear his voice, **8** do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert,

Proverbs 29:1 A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed—without remedy.

Zechariah 7:11-13 “But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. **12** They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the LORD Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the LORD Almighty was very angry. **13** “‘When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen,’ says the LORD Almighty.

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:11-22 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men)— **12** remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. **13** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, **15** by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, **16** and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. **17** He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. **18** For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. **21** In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. **22** And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Matthew 28:19-20 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Matthew 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Mark 13:10 And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.

NLT

Jeremiah 31:35-37 It is the LORD who provides the sun to light the day and the moon and stars to light the night. It is he who stirs the sea into roaring waves. His name is the LORD Almighty, and this is what he says: **36** “I am as likely to reject my people Israel as I am to do away with the laws of nature! **37** Just as the heavens cannot be measured and the foundation of the earth cannot be explored, so I will not consider casting them away forever for their sins. I, the LORD, have spoken!

Exodus 8:19 “This is the finger of God!” the magicians exclaimed to Pharaoh. But Pharaoh’s heart remained hard and stubborn. He wouldn’t listen to them, just as the LORD had predicted.

Exodus 9:34 When Pharaoh saw this, he and his officials sinned yet again by stubbornly refusing to do as they had promised. **35** Pharaoh refused to let the people leave, just as the LORD had predicted.

Deuteronomy 8:6-14 “So obey the commands of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and fearing him. **7** For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land of flowing streams and pools of water, with springs that gush forth in the valleys and hills. **8** It is a land of wheat and barley, of grapevines, fig trees, pomegranates, olives, and honey. **9** It is a land where food is plentiful and nothing is lacking. It is a land where iron is as common as stone, and copper is abundant in the hills. **10** When you have eaten your fill, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. **11** “But that is the time to be careful! Beware that in your plenty you do not forget the LORD your God and disobey his commands, regulations, and laws. **12** For when you have become full and prosperous and have built fine homes to live in, **13** and when your flocks and herds have become very large and your silver and gold have multiplied along with everything else, **14** that is the time to be careful. Do not become proud at that time and forget the LORD your God, who rescued you from slavery in the land of Egypt.

Exodus 17:1-7 At the LORD’s command, the people of Israel left the Sin Desert and moved from place to place. Eventually they came to Rephidim, but there was no water to be found there. **2** So once more the people grumbled and complained to Moses. “Give us water to drink!” they demanded. “Quiet!” Moses replied. “Why are you arguing with me? And why are you testing the LORD?”

3 But tormented by thirst, they continued to complain, “Why did you ever take us out of Egypt? Why did you bring us here? We, our children, and our livestock will all die!”

4 Then Moses pleaded with the LORD, “What should I do with these people? They are about to stone me!”

5 The LORD said to Moses, “Take your shepherd’s staff, the one you used when you struck the water of the Nile. Then call some of the leaders of Israel and walk on ahead of the people.

6 I will meet you by the rock at Mount Sinai. Strike the rock, and water will come pouring out. Then the people will be able to drink.” Moses did just as he was told; and as the leaders looked on, water gushed out. **7** Moses named the place Massah—“the place of testing”—and Meribah—“the place of arguing”—because the people of Israel argued with Moses and tested the Lord by saying, “Is the Lord going to take care of us or not?”

Psalms 95:7-8 for he is our God. We are the people he watches over, the sheep under his care. Oh, that you would listen to his voice today! **8** The LORD says, “Don’t harden your hearts as Israel did at Meribah, as they did at Massah in the wilderness.

Proverbs 29:1 Whoever stubbornly refuses to accept criticism will suddenly be broken beyond repair.

Zechariah 7:11-13 “Your ancestors would not listen to this message. They turned stubbornly away and put their fingers in their ears to keep from hearing. **12** They made their hearts as hard as stone, so they could not hear the law or the messages that the LORD Almighty had sent them by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. That is why the LORD Almighty was so angry with them. **13** “Since they refused to listen when I called to them, I would not listen when they called to me, says the LORD Almighty.

Galatians 3:28 There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. For you are all Christians—you are one in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:11-22 Don’t forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders by birth. You were called “the uncircumcised ones” by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. **12** In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from God’s people, Israel, and you did not know the promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope. **13** But now you belong to Christ Jesus. Though you once were far away from God, now you have been brought near to him because of the blood of Christ. **14** For Christ himself has made peace between us Jews and you Gentiles by making us all one people. He has broken down the wall of hostility that used to separate us. **15** By his death he ended the whole system of Jewish law that excluded the Gentiles. His purpose was to make peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new person from the two groups. **16** Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death, and our hostility toward each other was put to death. **17** He has brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and to us Jews who were near. **18** Now all of us, both Jews and Gentiles, may come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us. **19** So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God’s holy people. You are members of God’s family. **20** We are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. **21** We who believe are carefully joined together, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. **22** Through him you Gentiles are also joined together as part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

Matthew 28:19-20 Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. **20** Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Matthew 24:14 And the Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, so that all nations will hear it; and then, finally, the end will come.

Mark 13:10 And the Good News must first be preached to every nation.