

Lesson 27: God's Plan for Israel Involves a Future Revival, part 1

Romans 11:11-24

Invitation, Objection and Short answer

¹¹ I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be!

Long answer, part 1 (11b-24)

A. The rejection of Israel now will be followed by the acceptance of Israel later.

But by their transgression salvation *has come* to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. ¹² Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!

¹³ But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, ¹⁴ if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them.

¹⁵ For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will *their* acceptance be but life from the dead?

B. The Olive Tree illustrates the rightness of Israel's return while also warning Gentile believers.

¹⁶ If the first piece of *dough* is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too. ¹⁷ But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, ¹⁸ do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, *remember that* it is not you who supports the root, but the root *supports* you. ¹⁹ You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." ²⁰ Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; ²¹ for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. ²² Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. ²³ And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴ For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural *branches* be grafted into their own olive tree?

Long answer, part 2 (11:25-32) – next lesson

NASB

Introduction

John describes his glimpse into the throne room of God. He writes, "I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and the to the lamb (Revelation 7:9-11).'"

When I read this vision in college my response was, "Yes, let's take the gospel to the nations! How will they know if they do not hear and how will they hear if no one is sent!"

I still feel that in my heart. At the same time, I see something new that did not cross my mind before. John sees ethnic groups. There is a multitude bound together through worship of God and belief in Jesus. And the individuals express a wonderful variety of characteristics. On one level they are male and female, introvert and extrovert, thinkers and feelers, artists and engineers. Then there are these groupings of tribes and peoples who have shared physical attributes or customs or history or language, whatever makes up the culture or ethnicity of a people.

It is true that we have a shared identity that goes to the core of who we are as human beings which transcends our individual and cultural differences. At the same time, we maintain in the body of Christ our individuality and our culture. Personality and family and culture may not be that which is most important or most essential to being human or to being Christian, but it is part of who we are.

As Paul communicates what it means for Israel to be the people of God and part of the body of Christ, he is also providing us with a big picture grid to help us think about God's plan in history and

where we fit into that plan, not only as individuals but also as groups, nations and tribes and peoples and tongues.

In this lesson today, Paul's teaching about Israel also challenges us to consider who we are before God.

Invitation, objection and short answer (11:11a)

The second half of Romans 11 starts us off in verse 11 with Paul's typical rhetorical pattern, giving us an invitation and objection. "I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they?" This objection is very similar to the earlier objection in the first verse of chapter 11, "God has not rejected his people has he?" Paul answered that question by pointing to the remnant of Jewish believers in Jesus. God continues to draw Israelites into fellowship with him through Jesus. He has not rejected Israel.

This is a different question. The current objection "They did not stumble so as to fall, did they?" has to do with the place of Israel as a people in God's ongoing plan of salvation for the world. Israel held a very special position in salvation history from the time of Abraham to the crucifixion of Jesus. It is true that Israel is not left out of the New Covenant people of God. There is a significant remnant down to this day. But is that it for Israel? Did Israel's stumbling over Jesus as the Messiah lead to a long fall out of God's plan. As a people Israel has been hardened by the light of the gospel. They are cut off. Is that it for Israel? Or will there be a future exodus out of spiritual exile back into right relationship with God as a whole nation?

We can predict Paul's short answer because it is always the same, "May it never be!" Now we need to consider his longer answer. How does Paul answer the idea that Israel has stumbled so as to fall? How does he refute that?

His answer is rather long, extending from verse 11 all the way through verse 32. We will take two lessons to cover the whole response. The first part occurs in 11-24, that's our passage for this lesson. And we can break this down into two distinct sections. First, we have a summary of the answer in verses 11-15, then we have the olive tree illustration in 16-24. Let's read the whole passage and then address the two parts. So here we go, Romans 11:11-24.

[Read Romans 11:11-24]

Long answer, part 1 (11b-24)

A. The rejection of Israel now will be followed by the acceptance of Israel later (11b-15).

Paul gives us the outline of his answer in 11b-15 which moves back and forth from Israel to Gentiles. We have the same idea restated several times. In 11b we get this, "But by their transgression salvation *has come* to the Gentiles, to make them jealous." So, there is some transgression or sin that works out for the good of non-Jews but results in making Jews jealous. Then in verse 12, "Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!" Again, we see the sin and failure of Israel results in riches for the world, for Gentiles. And we get the added idea that if their sin turned out to be good for others, how much more positive would their fulfillment be.

Paul shifts slightly in verse 13 and 14 to make a parenthetical statement about his own ministry to the Gentiles. "But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them." Paul's ministry to the Gentiles is magnified or made even better if it can result in also gathering in some of the Jewish remnant. He recognizes that his ministry of inviting Gentiles into the kingdom of God is offensive to most of his countrymen, but he doesn't do it out of spite to Israel. He is not going to change his message to make it more acceptable to Jews, but he is glad if his ministry might stir up some even by way of jealousy to bring them into the body of Christ.

He then comes back in verse 15 to restate again the principle that if what is bad for Israel turns out as good for the Gentiles, how much better if Israel also experiences the good. "For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will *their* acceptance be but life from the dead?"

Let's tackle three words here that will help us clarify Paul's points. The three words are transgression, fulness and jealousy.

(1) *Transgression* First, what is the transgression? The transgression of the Jews, in this case, is the rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. That rejection climaxed in the crucifixion of Jesus and is ongoing in the hardness of Israel towards Jesus. Though the treatment of Jesus was an awful moment in the history of Israel, his crucifixion very clearly resulted in riches for the world.

(2) *Fulness* The second word, fulness, occurs at the end of verse 12. My Bible translates it as fulfillment, but it is important that we recognize it is the same Greek word as in verse 25 which reads, "a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in." In verse 25 Paul speaks of the fulness of the Gentiles and in verse 12 the fulness of Israel. It is not clear what fulness actually indicates. Is it qualitative implying bringing a people to true knowledge or to full maturity, or is it a quantitative thing implying a full number? Paul does not say, and for our purposes we do not need to know. The big picture idea is what matters. After the transgression of the Jews, the crucifixion of Jesus, God launched a mission to the Gentile peoples of the world. God has in his mind what he plans to accomplish through that mission. It will enable the vision of Revelation 7:9 of a multitude from every people and tribe. When that mission has reached its fulness according to the plan of God, then God will bring about the fulness of Israel. We do not expect the fulness of Israel right now. Right now, we are aware of a hardening of Israel. Paul is indicating to us that we should look forward to something more for Israel, an acceptance that leads to life, a fulness or fulfillment. That is coming.

(3) *Jealousy* How about the word jealousy? What makes Paul use that word to describe the Jewish response to the Gentile mission? How does that word help us better understand the nature of the hardening of Israel?

To understand the jealousy, we need to step back and take a broad view of history. God's promise to Abraham was a promise to provide for and protect the nation of Israel that would come from him and also through that nation to bless all nations. Faithful Jews understood their role to bless the nations. They just understood the blessing of Gentiles to result from Gentiles coming to Israel. For example, the vision God gave in Isaiah 2:3 describes many peoples saying, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob that he may teach us concerning his ways and that we may walk in his paths." You see it is many peoples, but they are coming to Jerusalem.

Gentiles entered relationship with God by coming through Israel, by submitting to the religious culture of Israel. Rahab came to God through Israel. Ruth came to God through Israel. Naaman came to God through Israel. Moses taught Israel in Deuteronomy 4:6 that if they obeyed the Law then the peoples around them would notice the goodness and prosperity of Israel and would say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." They would understand God through Israel.

You can hear in that statement the danger of God's promise to provide and protect. The people that walks with God reaps benefits. The people that walks with God experiences blessing and grows in wisdom and understanding. The people that walks with God has something to boast about. And people are never really very good at giving credit where credit is due. Success, even success grounded in God, leads human beings to pride and to boasting

Faithful Jews at the time of Paul may have believed in their role to bless the Gentiles. But it would come by their efforts to live out the Law, and Gentiles would receive it by attaching themselves to Israel. And that happened. When Paul visited synagogues on his missionary journeys there were often God-fearing Jews connected to the synagogues. The blessing comes through Israel.

Pride in this role and pride in the customs of the Law spurred on a jealousy when Paul succeeded with Gentiles by preaching a gospel not requiring attachment to Israel. We see it in the record of Paul's missionary work. Acts 13 tells an early story in Paul's ministry in Antioch Pisidia. When he visited there, the synagogue officials asked Paul to give a word of exhortation which, of course, Paul

did and which, of course, was about Jesus. The text says that the people begged Paul to come back and speak again next Sabbath. They did not have a problem with what he said. They were interested. Next Sabbath nearly the whole city turned up. This had never happened before. They had some God-fearers among them. They had some response from Gentiles but nothing like this. This was amazing. All these Gentiles coming to the synagogue. So, how did the Jews respond? Acts 13:45 says, "They were filled with jealousy, and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul and by Barnabas." Paul quotes Isaiah to them, "I have placed you as a light for the Gentiles that you should bring salvation to the end of the earth (Acts 14:47; Isaiah 42:6; 49:6)." He is saying, "Don't be surprised at this response from the Gentiles." The quote does not do any good. Paul is pushed out, so he turns from the synagogue to the people of the city.

This was a regular pattern for Paul. At times he received a welcome from Jews, but whenever Gentiles accepted the gospel, the majority of Jews became aggressive and jealous, rejecting Paul. You can imagine a mixture of feeling. Paul was not requiring Gentiles to become Jewish. He was making it too easy for them. He was having great success among them, and they resented Paul. And because of their jealousy, because of their rejecting of the gospel, riches went out to the Gentiles. When Paul writes this in Romans, he is not just writing sound theology. He is also giving us his missionary experience.

The stumbling of the Jews freed the gospel to go out unfettered.

It is interesting to imagine what would have happened if Israel had come, as a whole people, to the gospel. Peter saw thousands come to Christ in the early days of the Jerusalem revival, and that was a significant remnant. That revival was shut down by the authorities, forcing the gospel out of Jerusalem and out of Israel. But what if the revival had just continued to grow? What if Israel accepted Jesus as Messiah, and the temple became the center of Christian worship? How would that have affected the mission to the Gentiles?

I can't know for sure, but I do know as an American working cross-culturally that it is impossible not to bring your culture with you. We cannot in the end separate biblical Christianity from our own cultural values and experience. People can receive the gospel message from someone who is foreign, but they themselves must work to help the gospel become their own. And with such a strong Old Testament biblical culture, I can only imagine that success among the Jews would have resulted in missionary preaching very tied to the Old Testament Jewish culture. We continue to see that struggle in the New Testament letters between Gentiles and the Jewish remnant in Jerusalem led by James. But Israel did not come to the gospel as a whole culture. They did not make the temple a center of Christianity and the synagogues throughout the empire did not become lighthouses of hope. In a way, this rejection of the gospel by the Jews resulted in a blessing to the Gentiles. The gospel was forcibly detached from Jewish culture, rejected and pushed out. As a result, the gospel went unfettered by Jewishness. It went out in a form more palatable, more acceptable, more readily received among Gentiles.

In America we have blond-haired, blue-eyed pictures of Jesus. And there is a problem with that which we are going to get to. But there is something good as well. It says that Jesus belongs to me as an Anglo-Saxon. I feel like he belongs to my culture. But I have also seen African pictures of Jesus and South American pictures of Jesus and Indian pictures of Jesus and Asian pictures of Jesus. Jesus belongs to us. That's what this says. His gospel is for my culture, my people, not just for me but definitely for me. The transgression of the Jews brought about riches for the Gentiles because the simple gospel message went out, and it was received, and it was planted among the peoples.

Is that all for Israel? Verse 15 says, "For if their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead." We are thinking here of Israel as a whole. A remnant of Israelites have trusted in Jesus, experiencing life from the dead. But mostly the gospel has been rejected and the house of Israel left spiritually destitute. In the olive tree illustration, Paul teaches us that Israel is not necessarily out, and for that matter, we ourselves should be careful not to repeat Israel's mistake.

B. The Olive Tree illustrates the rightness of Israel's return while also warning Gentile believers (16-24). Let's read the illustration in 11:16-24.

[Read Romans 11:16-24]

Paul gives a picture here to help us imagine the New Covenant people of God. The tree is the body of Christ. The people of God are defined by faith in Jesus. Belief includes peoples into the tree. Israel has been largely excluded. But the exclusion of Israel is not necessary or even natural. The tree sprung up out of Jewish soil, out of the history and the world view of the Old Testament. If anyone can naturally appreciate how Jesus fulfills the Law and promises, it would be an Israelite. The body of Christ is a natural home for Jews.

The illustration has a horticultural problem. You do not graft wild branches into a cultivated olive tree. Wild olives have large pits with little meat or oil. But wild olive trees can have strong, durable root systems. If you do any grafting, you do not graft wild branches onto a cultivated tree. You graft cultivated branches that produce plumb, juicy olives onto a strongly rooted tree.

Some commentators suggest Paul just got this wrong because he is a scholar who grew up in the city. Others say it does not matter anyway because it is just an illustration. I have a serious problem with the suggestion Paul did not know what he was talking about. Coming from a city in North Carolina, I grew up never seeing a real olive tree. I didn't know anything about olives or grafting olives or any of that. But I have been in Croatia for a long time now. And in Split, we purchased our excellent quality olive oil like everybody else in a two-liter plastic coke bottle from our neighbor. During the season after Sunday service, sometimes we had a taste testing of oil from different members' trees to guess which extraction process was used. By tasting you had to figure out how they extracted the oil. Mediterranean people know their olives. How much more so back in Paul's day when 90% of humanity worked in agriculture?

I say that Paul knew exactly what he was saying. The incongruity of the illustration is intended. You do not graft wild branches into a solid tree. That's the point. Compared to the Jews, we Gentiles are wild and unnatural. While Paul was writing this half my ancestors were worshipping gods dancing naked around sacred trees in Germany and the other half were dancing around standing stones in Brittan. We were not natural candidates for this olive tree. We didn't have the history. We didn't have the culture. We didn't have the belief in one God. We didn't belong. It was all foreign. So, now we can come back to the blond haired, blue-eyed pictures of Jesus. The gospel is for everyone and Jesus is for everyone, still, Jesus is of the tribe of David from a Jewish mother. The patriarchs are Jewish, the writers of the Old Testament are Jewish, the writers of the New Testament, apart from Luke, are Jewish. The New Testament books all sit firmly in the theological worldview of the Old Testament Bible. Israel was elected as a nation to serve a special purpose. The body of Christ is the natural home of Israel. We Gentiles are the foreigners, accepted by grace.

Has Israel stumbled so as to fall out of the picture? The olive tree illustration tells us there is no reason that Israel as a people of faith could not return and take their place in the body of Christ. The olive tree illustration also warns the rest of us Gentiles against making the same mistake as Israel.

Paul warns Gentile communities not to make the same mistake as Israel.

What was Israel's mistake? After the Tower of Babel, God moved to a divide and conquer strategy. He would divide the peoples into various nations, tribes and cultures, then he would take one people to shine as a light among the rest as a witness. Through them he would bless the nations. He did not choose the mightiest or the wealthiest or the most righteous. He chose a man and woman advanced in age who could not have children. He called into being a people that was not a people. He allowed that nation to grow up as slaves in Egypt. And when he led them into the promised land, he told them, "it is not because of your strength or your righteousness but because of the choice of the Lord (Deuteronomy 8:17; 9:4 and 10:15)." What makes Israel so special? What is the core of their identity? I will tell you. It is not their Jewishness. It is the same as yours. (1) They are created in the

image of God, male and female. (2) They are fallen. (3) They are accepted 100% by grace. (4) They are being remade into God's image. The worth of a Jew is the same as the worth of an Indian, an African, an Asian, a European, an American. Our core identity is not in the specialness of our history or culture but in our humanity and in God's love for us.

Israel allowed the law and traditions and history and success that came from God to take central place in their core identity. They could not accept a Messiah who wanted center place if that meant pushing out the law and customs that they felt made them Jewish. God does not require that we forget our culture and customs. He does require we move it out of the way, out of the center. Israel took what was good and made it central, so central that they could not get past it to Jesus. They could not let go of the identity that they created for themselves and their own pursuit of righteousness to accept the identity that God declared to be true of them.

Every Christian nation, every denomination, every local church is tempted to do exactly the same thing. To let our traditions and culture and history become central to what defines us. For example, where I live, to be Croatian is to be Roman Catholic, to be Serbian is to be Eastern Orthodox. Your faith defines your identity. And when a whole nation connects with one branch of the Christian faith, the danger becomes very real that the traditions and sacraments and culture will come to define the believer instead of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We Christians are in just as much danger of stumbling over Jesus as the Jews were. It is not only a danger for a so-called Christian nation. It is a danger for every church and denomination that traditions and culture would take center place, such that we believe our children and grandchildren to be safe because they say the right words and know the right history and value the right traditions. They are not safe! If the nation of Israel can be cut off, then any people, any church, any denomination can be cut off. Any Christian group that does not hold the gospel of Jesus Christ as the most central and important and defining reality, is very near to being cut off. This is history. God does not stick with peoples who claim his name but remove their hearts far from him. God continues to build his church. The gates of hell cannot prevail against it. But that church is not an institution or a movement or a denomination. That church is the gathered who have professed faith in Jesus Christ.

This is how I understand Romans 11:18-21, "Do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, 'Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.' Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you." When the simple gospel message of faith in Jesus Christ and the grace of Jesus Christ is no longer central then we are cut out of the tree, our churches, our denomination, our nation. We are not part of the tree if Jesus is not central.

Does the olive tree illustration teach that a true Christian can lose salvation?

A normal question that arises out of the olive tree illustration is whether Paul teaches here that Christians can lose their salvation. What I have said so far serves as my basis for the answer to that. The olive tree illustration is here for two reasons: first, to demonstrate how Israel as a people is cut off from the body of Christ but as a people could come back in and second, to warn Gentile peoples and communities from making the same error as the people of Israel.

In one sense, this language applies to individuals. "They were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear..." Individuals believe, and individuals choose not to believe. When we talk about inclusion in the body of Christ, we always speak in some sense on an individual level. At the same time, notice here that those Jews who were cut off are those who never believed in the gospel. In some sense we are thinking of the nation of Israel as the people of God, as part of the tree, and then they get cut off because they don't receive Jesus. They were part of the people of God only by name. They were members of Israel. In a parallel sense, the Gentiles cut off may not be individuals who have believed in Jesus, but may be like Israel, part of a Christian Gentile community that over time has come to rely on its own culture and traditions and pursuit of

righteousness. Those who bear the name Christian may not develop true faith in Christ. And so, they too will be cut off as a community like Israel. Maybe there is still a remnant of believers among this Gentile Christian people or denomination or church, whatever the group is. But largely the group is cut away from the body of Christ when the gospel disappears from that group. They only have the name. This makes the most sense to me as an interpretation because it parallels the Gentile experience to the Israel experience. We are talking about larger groups and communities.

The individualistic language that you stand by faith and you also can be cut off makes the warning poignant to any member of any Christian community who feels they are safe because they are part of a Christian people or tradition. You are not safe just because you grew up in a Christian home or a Christian nation or part of a Christian church. Just as the Jews were broken off, so too will you be if your faith is not in the simple gospel of Jesus Christ. Have you believed? Are you standing by grace through faith? That's the question Paul is putting to you. If so, you walk in his kindness. If not, you will experience his severity just as the Jews hardened to the gospel experienced his severity and were cut off.

If you still feel that Paul teaches here that a true believer can lose their salvation, then you need to work that out with the beginning of Romans 5 and the end of the Romans 8. Paul teaches our security in Christ in those passages, and he does it powerfully. So, however we interpret the olive tree passage, it should not be in such a way as to remove the security of the believer. No one can separate us from the love of Christ. And to remove that security is to remove a major plank from Paul's earlier argument about why the gospel so powerfully produces righteous living. And it does so because we are safe in him. He is transforming us, and he has called us, he has justified us, he is going to glorify us. We are safe. So, however you understand the olive tree illustration, it has got to fit in with the argument Paul has already made.

Conclusion

Okay. Let's wrap this up.

Aside from this warning to Christian Gentiles not to fall into the same error as the people of Israel, the olive tree illustration's main point is summed up in 11:24, "For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?" How natural it would be for Israel to be grafted back into the body of Christ.

Two broad principles come to my mind as we think about this big picture view of history and of peoples. The body of Christ is comprised of a variety of ethnic identities. When we envision his throne room, we see a multitude from every nation, people, tribe and language. We retain our ethnic and cultural identity in the body of Christ. The great commission instructs us to make disciples of all nations, that is all peoples. The fulness of the Gentiles has something to do with a remnant from all peoples coming to faith in Jesus Christ. And the fulness of Israel has something to do with ethnic Israel still playing a role in God's plan.

We also have this principle. Though our ethnicity, language, culture and traditions help make up our special uniqueness, these things do not define the most central truths about us. At the very core of who you are as a human being and as a member of the body of Christ, these are the vital truths about you. (1) You are created in the image of God. (2) You are fallen as a sinner. (3) You are fully accepted as forgiven and righteous in Christ. (4) You are being renewed into the image of Jesus. This is where your worth is derived. This is what makes us brothers and sisters of one family, many peoples, but one family. These are the most central truths to be passed down to our children as we teach them who they are. These are the reasons we hope for men and women of every nation to come to faith in Jesus Christ. And this is why we pray for the renewal of the people of Israel.

Reflection Questions

1. What stands out to you as important, confusing, interesting or strange in Romans 11:11-24?

2. Does this passage adjust or refine how you view Israel, as you think about the key words transgression, fullness and jealousy or as you think about the olive tree illustration? What stands out to you about Israel?

3. When Paul wrote this passage, the long tradition of Israel dominated the history of salvation. The Christian church was not quite 30 years old. Now, 2000 years later, entire cultures have been affected by Judeo-Christian values. There are cultures that identify with major branches of the Christian faith, whether Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox or Protestant. Some denominations and local churches boast hundreds of years of tradition and experience. The olive tree has grown over time such that we can imagine Christian peoples, denominations and churches having been grafted into the tree and having already been cut off or are in the process of being cut off from the tree.

Consider the picture below. Okay. It's our daisy from an earlier lesson and not an olive tree. This illustration pictures better the idea of the remnant from every people. Each petal is a nation, but only part of the petal overlaps with the body of Christ. That part is the remnant.

a. Reimagine the petals with different branches of Christianity or denominations in your society.

What would some of those be? Some may have a very small remnant of true believers, some a larger remnant. How is your own church or denomination doing? Is there a temptation to value history, culture and tradition over the simple message of Christ? Or is there a temptation toward pride in how well you are doing (remember Paul's warning)?

b. How about the issue of jealousy? In what ways might Christians of one church or of one ethnic group express jealousy regarding the work of Christ among another ethnic group or church? Describe some time you felt jealousy toward what God is doing among another community?

a. Reimagine the petals with the more specific people groups or cultures in your immediate society. How is Christianity expressed differently in these different cultures? What are some things you appreciate about how a different ethnic group worships or practice their faith? Describe some of the characteristics you admire in a particular brother or sister in Christ who comes from a different ethnic group than you.

