



Sermon Growth Guide

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The Story Is Not Over | Romans 11:13-24

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Key Verse: Romans 11:15 – “But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!”

Big Idea: God is still writing every story we’ve quietly declared finished, so we hold fast in humble, persevering faith rather than sliding into arrogance or despair.

Foundations

We all have places where we’ve quietly rolled the credits. A relationship that seems beyond repair. A child who’s wandered. A habit we can’t seem to break. A faith that feels worn thin.

Romans 11 reminds us that God is not intimidated by dead ends. The same God who brought life from an empty tomb continues to graft broken branches back into His living tree. Paul reminds us that our hope is not rooted in our strength, our consistency, or our ability to fix what’s broken. It is rooted in Christ, who holds us fast. That doesn’t mean every story unfolds the way we want or every hardship disappears. It means no chapter is beyond God’s redeeming work while He is still writing.

So don’t leave the movie before the ending. Don’t surrender to despair before God has spoken His final word. Hold fast. The resurrection is proof that with God, the story is not over.

Understanding God’s Word

Read Romans 11:13-24 together. Paul says that God brings “life from the dead” (v. 15). How does the resurrection of Jesus shape the way we should read the rest of this passage? Why does Paul use the image of an olive tree and grafted branches? What does this metaphor teach us about God’s people and His saving work? Paul warns Gentile believers against arrogance (vv. 17-22). Why was that warning necessary for the Roman church, and why is it still relevant for Christians today?

Applying God’s Word

Where have you quietly decided that God is finished working? What would it look like to surrender the ending of that story back to Him? Have you found yourself looking down on another Christian, another church, or someone who doesn’t yet know Christ? How might practicing humility strengthen your relationships this week?

Witnessing God’s Word

Who have you stopped praying for because you’ve assumed they’ll never change? Is there anyone you’ve quietly decided is “too far gone” for God? How might God be inviting you to demonstrate patient hope rather than quiet resignation? What is one small step you could take this week to remind someone they are loved?

When I was in middle school, my parents got a Dodge Grand Caravan, and the best part was its flip-down TV screen. We frequently drove around the Chicago area to visit family, which usually meant about an hour in the car depending on traffic. This made the TV a lifesaver, but there was one major problem: the average Hollywood movie hits its climax around the 60-to-70-minute mark. This meant our car movies frequently shut off right at the most dramatic, intense scene imaginable. The Nazis have the Ark and Indiana Jones is tied to a post; the Death Star is operational and the Rebel base is minutes from obliteration; or George Bailey is broke, standing on a bridge, and ready to jump. Suddenly, the car shuts off, the screen goes blank, and you hear, “Okay kids! Time to go visit Grandma!” You never want to walk out of a movie too early, yet we often do this exact same thing in our own lives. We look at a failing friendship, a wayward child, a struggling marriage, a career setback, or a battle with addiction and say, “That’s it! This thing is too far gone.” There is likely an area in your life where you have quietly rolled the credits, deciding that God is done before He has actually said He is done.

As a church, we are continuing through the book of Romans, and this is the exact mistake the Roman Christians were tempted to make regarding Israel. Seeing that most Jews rejected Jesus, they assumed it was over for them. However, Paul offers a different perspective, confident that God takes the long view when it comes to His saving and

reconciling work. Returning to Romans 11, we are reminded that “The Story is not Over,” and Paul provides three things to reassure us of God’s faithfulness: a Pattern, Proof, and a Promise.

1. A Pattern: Life from the Dead

First, we see a Pattern, which is an invitation to remember what God has already done. Paul admits he hopes his ministry to non-Jews will inspire his Jewish brothers and sisters to turn to Jesus, writing in verse 15, “If their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?” This phrase isn’t just a casual turn of phrase; it is resurrection language. Paul is calling us to reflect on how God routinely takes dead ends and turns them into doorways. Joseph sat rotting in a prison until God made him second in command of Egypt. Moses bumped up against the Red Sea and God split it in half. Jesus called Lazarus out from a tomb. This is the pattern of the entire gospel: death, then life; a cross, then an empty tomb; a door that looks sealed shut on Friday, standing wide open by Sunday. Israel’s story, and our story, relies on this signature move of God.

2. Proof: Grafted Into the Tree

Second, there is Proof of His work. In verses 17 and 18, Paul uses the imagery of an olive tree—a familiar, incredibly resilient fixture of the ancient Mediterranean world that could live and

produce fruit for thousands of years. Paul notes that a gardener can take a wild olive shoot and graft it into a cultivated tree to make it fruitful or protect it from disease. Paul tells the Roman Christians that they are like wild olive branches. They were never supposed to be near this tree, yet out of pure mercy, God grafted them into His family. Before receiving the Holy Spirit, they were fruitless, but now they are living proof of God's power. Paul shares this same sentiment in Ephesians 2, reminding Gentile believers that they were once dead in their transgressions, but God made them alive with Christ, turning nation-less vagabonds and scattered loose stones into fellow citizens and members of His household. Whether you were raised in the faith or clearly remember the moment the Gardener grafted your "wild shoot" into His story, if you are in Christ, you are living proof of His faithfulness.

3. The Problem of Pride

Before moving to the final point, we must acknowledge a fourth "P" that serves as the backdrop for this letter: The Problem. On our childhood minivan trips, it was always safer to watch TV episodes on DVD because you were guaranteed to finish an episode of *I Love Lucy* in time. Watching those old shows, I noticed a common trope where two feuding roommates or siblings would yell, "This place isn't big enough for the both of us!" and run a piece of tape down the middle of the room to section off their

sides. This is exactly what was happening behind the scenes in Rome. The Gentile Christians had seemingly given up on the Jews and were trying to tape off God's kingdom. Paul firmly corrects this arrogance in verses 20–22, warning them to tremble rather than be proud: "For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God." This sobering medicine against pride reminds us that it is entirely by grace that we are included at all.

4. A Promise: God Isn't Finished

This humility leads us directly to the Promise found in verses 23 and 24. Paul explains that if the natural branches do not persist in unbelief, God is fully able to graft them back in—and doing so would be much more natural than grafting in wild branches. The Reformer Martin Luther likened this to the story of Joseph, whose brothers rejected him and sold him into slavery, only to later re-encounter him as Pharaoh's right-hand man saving them from famine. Luther hypothesized that the Jews who initially expelled Christ to the Gentiles would similarly come to Him savingly in the end. The ultimate promise here is that God is still writing His redemption story, and no one is too far gone to be grafted back in. No verdict is final except God's.

Fifteen years ago, my sister Kristin was in a horrific motorcycle accident. That first night, we didn't know if she would survive, and I flew home praying I'd just be able to say goodbye. If the movie of her life had ended right there in an ICU hallway full of an active ventilator and a silent, grieving family, that would have been a tragic story. But the

credits didn't roll. Kristin survived, overcame a Traumatic Brain Injury, and learned to walk again. She eventually walked down the aisle to marry the man she was in the accident with, walked into the hospital to give birth to my three nephews, and now regularly walks onto church platforms to lead worship. The last 15 years have involved immense pain and endless doctor appointments, but our family knows exactly what it feels like to be completely certain of a tragic ending, only to be proven wrong in the best possible way.

Holding Fast to the Pen

However, I must offer a crucial warning so you don't leave with the wrong promise in your pocket. In my childhood minivan, there were plenty of movies where the ending was not what we hoped for—films like *The Mist*, *Million Dollar Baby*, *The Green Mile*, or *The Perfect Storm*. We naturally want to see the boxer win or the ship survive the storm, but life is not automatically “up and to the right” when we follow Jesus. We cannot fall into a “prosperity gospel” mindset that assumes enough faith or correct theology guarantees health, wealth, and a life free of hardship. Marriages still fracture, cancer still takes people we love, and branches still get bruised or stripped by hailstorms.

Being grafted into the root does not mean you avoid the storm; it means you will always share in the nourishing sap of the root. The promise is not that everything will work out exactly how you want it to, but rather that God isn't finished. Whatever painful page or chapter you are reading right now, you can be sure God hasn't put the pen down. One of our core church values is to Hold Fast—to stay founded on Scripture and centered on Christ. Holding fast doesn't mean gripping a specific, desired outcome until your knuckles turn white; it means staying tethered to Jesus while He writes the ending. In Christ, God has already turned the ultimate dead end of the grave into an open doorway, and the empty tomb is proof of what He wants to do with your life. Don't walk out of the movie too early.