

3. In chapter 14, Paul is talking about relationships within the church. What word in 15:2 does he use that extends this teaching? Why is this significant?

4. How much emphasis does Paul put on NOT pleasing ourselves in this section?

5. Who does Paul use as our example of this principle? (vs 3) What does Philippians 2:6-7 say about this?

Paul uses the word “neighbor” in verse 2. The terms “brother” and “sister” refer to believers, but any human being can be your “neighbor” (Luke 10:25-37). So, Paul’s exhortation in 15:1 applies to everyone we meet, in all areas of life.

6. Paul quotes from Psalm 69 in verse 3. Try reading this verse in another translation as well. What does it mean?

Bearing the weakness of others seems to be our obligation according to verse one. Robert Mounce wrote, “The term ‘bear’ goes beyond mere tolerance or putting up with others’ limitations. It requires enough care to personally shoulder their burdens as if they were our own. Why? Because we love them enough to want to help them toward maturity, toward their highest good.” Hmmm ... isn’t that what Christ did for us?

In the NLT, verse 3b reads this way, “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on Me.” In other words, not only did Christ give up His deity and His life, He even sacrificed His innocence for our guilt. Paul is telling us that it’s the least we can do to give up a few freedoms for the sake of another!

7. Is God calling you to bear someone else’s weakness with them? Is there someone in your life that you need to be better at building up to edification?

8. According to verse 4, what are three benefits of the Old Testament? (The words “patience and comfort” can also be translated “perseverance and encouragement.”)

I love verse 4. The first time I read it, it seemed a bit insignificant, or one of those verses you just breeze by. But as I pondered it, it’s really cool! I love the Word of God, as I’m sure you do, too. And this verse reminds us that the Scriptures **teach** us, so we can look to them for guidance. They **encourage** us, by reminding us who God is, showing us the lives of other saints who have gone before us, and giving us **hope**. The Old Testament promises an amazing future for us. Why doesn’t everyone want to read the Word?

9. How diligent are you in reading the Word of God? Do you read it daily for guidance, wisdom, encouragement, exhortation, and hope? How does one book accomplish all of that?

10. How does the Bible give us hope?

Memory Verse of the Week: “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Romans 15:13

Second Day

Work on your memory verse.

Yesterday I asked how the Bible gives us hope. I love what I read in Shepherd’s Notes. “It is through the endurance taught in Scripture and the encouragement it brings that we are enabled to live in hope. The difficulties of today are bearable because God in His Word tells us of a better time to come. He mediates His comfort and encouragement by speaking through His Word to the hearts of receptive believers. To separate ourselves from the Scripture is to turn a deaf ear to the voice of a Heavenly Father anxious to console.” I pray that we don’t ever turn a deaf ear to our Father!

1. Today let's begin by reading Romans 15:1-7 again. What do verses 5-6 say about unity? What do you think that means? Can we ever disagree?

2. What's our goal, or our mission, according to verse 6?

John Stott put it like this: "Unity, liberty, charity. These are the building blocks of healthy relationships whether in a church, family, or cluster of friends. Unity says that we choose to stay together. Liberty says that we respect each other as individuals and allow certain freedoms because of that respect. Charity says we give love even when it is not deserved, and that we allow ourselves to receive love even when we do not deserve it."

3. Referring to the paragraph above, which of the three seems to be the most difficult for you to extend to others, and why?

4. Keller says that "Unity does not come when we seek it; rather, it is a by-product of seeking to follow Christ." What does he mean?

5. Is unity lacking between you and "someone"? (An individual, a group, a church, etc.) What can you do? (Or what "should" you do?)

6. Read Romans 15:8-13, which concludes or wraps up the main body of Paul's letter. It seems like Paul strategically moves from unity between the weak and strong through Christ, to the unity of Jews and Gentiles through the same Christ! How does he do it? What does he say about the Jews? About the Gentiles?

For those who are interested, I wanted to include a bit more about the Old Testament quotes Paul uses in verses 9-12. I hope it's helpful.

<u>Passage</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
2 Samuel 22:50 and Psalm 18:49	David vows to praise God among the Gentiles. Israel was to be the instrument through whom God's redemptive work would extend to the Gentiles.
Deut. 32:43	From Moses' great hymn celebrating God's victory over Pharaoh and his army: "Rejoice, O nations, with his people."
Psalm 117:1	The salvation of the Gentiles was in God's mind from the very first.
Isaiah 11:10	The Messiah will come as a shoot springing up from the stump of David's family line. He will rule the nations, and on Him the Gentiles will "rest their hopes."

See you tomorrow, friends!

Third Day

Spend some time on your memory verse. Ask the Lord to show you who needs that prayer today.

Paul now begins to wrap up this book, giving more space to its conclusion than any of his other books. (Keep in mind that he had never visited Rome.) In this section, Paul is going to make some final observations, tell of his future travel plans, and then throws in some greetings, warnings, and prayer.

1. Read Romans 15:14-21. What does Paul say is the goal of his ministry?
2. Paul praises his readers for three things in verse 14. What are they?

The word goodness means more than an occasional nice act, it denotes goodness in "plentiful supply." It emphasizes moral excellence, uprightness, etc. He compliments them on their knowledge, implying that they had a good grasp of the Christian teachings that were needed to walk in the Spirit. Lastly, he applauds them for having the ability to admonish one

another, which means having the ability to keep each other on track. They weren't afraid to "set things right" when need be. Paul has been a bit hard on them, but now he is acknowledging what they do well!

3. If someone was going to describe you, would they be able to use these three terms: goodness, knowledge, and possessing the ability to admonish?

4. Are you able to admonish people in the spirit of love? What does Proverbs 27:6 say? How does "correction" help others to grow in their faith?

5. Are you able to receive admonishment very well? Do you need to grow in this area?

Paul reminds them that his words are more than simply advice, they come with the authority of Christ. He tells them he trusts they can live and work out the truths presented in his letter, and he reminds them that it's right they do so, because he is not "self-appointed," but rather, is "a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles" (vs 16), "because of the grace God gave me" (vs 15).

6. In verse 16, what does he mean by the phrase "the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable?" How are the Gentiles an "offering"?

7. How is everything we do in obedience to Christ an "offering" as well?

8. Paul saw his converts as offerings to God because they were the fruit of his labor, which he did "unto the Lord"! I think this is so interesting. Do you see your ministry, your service, your obedience, as an offering to God? If you did, would it change your attitude? Perspective? Your motive?

In verse 17, we begin to see how Paul felt about his ministry. Swindoll wrote, “The Gentiles’ widespread acceptance of the Gospel meant a great deal to Paul. Although he refused to accept any credit for bringing them to Christ, he did express a deep sense of satisfaction. What was Paul most proud of? Not the extent of his ministry nor the signs and wonders that affirmed and spread it. No, for Paul, the most important aspect was that the Gentiles were coming to Christ and living in obedience to Him through what he said and did. His pride was not on account of what he had done but in what God had done through him. Christ was his motivation and goal.”

9. Paul gives his strategy for evangelism in verses 20-21. What kind of places did he want to go? Why?

Timothy Keller makes a really interesting observation regarding Paul’s preaching. “Paul speaks of ‘Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum,’ where ‘I have fully proclaimed the Gospel of Christ (19).’ How can Paul say this, when clearly there were hundreds of towns and villages and thousands of people who had not been exposed to his Christian message? But here is the key to the statement: Paul’s missionary strategy was highly urban. He ignored the towns and villages but went instead into every large and influential city and evangelized until a vital, growing movement of house churches was developing. Once he had done that, his pioneering, urban work was done in a whole region, that is how central cities were to his thinking. If he had planted a church in the region’s biggest city, he was ‘done’ in that area.” Stott added, “Paul’s strategy was to evangelize the populous and influential cities, and plant churches there, and then leave to others the radiation of the Gospel into the surrounding villages.”

It appears that Paul understood his calling was unique. In verse 21, he quotes Isaiah 52:15 to give credibility to his pioneering work, showing that Christ was fulfilling this prophecy through his minister. From Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum covered about 1,400 miles.

10. In verse 22, Paul tells his readers why he hasn’t been able to visit them yet. What reason does he give?

Tomorrow we’ll continue to hear about Paul’s travel plans, but for now, think about how intentional Paul was. He had a definite strategy for his evangelism, as well as being led by the Spirit. Do you have any strategies to win souls for the Lord?

Fourth Day

Work on your verse.

1. Let's begin by reading Romans 15:14-22 again to get everything in context. Then focus on verses 23-33. Where does Paul hope to eventually visit? But where did he hope to stop first?

Paul's desire to see Rome never went away. He also mentions three destinations. "First, he would set sail from Corinth to Jerusalem, taking with him an offering for the church there. Second, he planned to travel from Jerusalem to Rome, even though he'd only be passing through. Finally, he'd make the trek to Spain, his ultimate destination. These plans were not simply sightseeing trips, and in Paul's day, this kind of travel was very risky. There is actually no evidence that Paul ever made it to Spain. Some traditions says he did, but we don't really know for sure. If he did, he would have been released from his imprisonment in Rome, where the Book of Acts leaves him, and then resumed his missionary travels and made it to Spain before being re-arrested, incarcerated, and finally beheaded under Nero's persecution." (Swindoll)

2. What kind of "help" do you think Paul needed from them? (vs 24)
3. It seemed to be a "normal" thing to help missionaries at that time. Are you willing to help missionaries as they travel through? What are some practical ways they may need help?

The word "help" is from the Greek word "propempe" which means "to help on one's journey with food, money, by arranging for companions, means of travel, etc."

No one seems to be certain why Paul felt the need to go to Jerusalem. Jerusalem was considered the "mother" church at the time, so some believe Paul was trying to get the two churches to bond, as well as unite the Jews and Gentiles in their churches. Some believe that the church in Jerusalem was suffering because of a famine (Acts 11:27-28). Others think Paul was collecting some type of "tax" to give them. Whatever the reason, Paul was collecting from the Gentile churches to give money as a "humble, material, symbolic, demonstration of their indebtedness." (Craig Keener) Most, though, believe that it was simply practical relief at a time when the poor Jewish believers needed it most. Details about this collection are recorded in 2 Corinthians 8-9.

4. We don't know how much money they gave or even why they gave, but we know they gave "generously and joyfully." (2 Cor. 9:7) How generous are you when giving to the Lord and to people in need? And with what attitude do you give? Do you give because you feel obligated or because you want to please the Lord? What do these verses say about this? (Proverbs 3:9-10, Malachi 3:10-12, 2 Corinthians 9:6-10, and Philippians 4:19) Can you outgive God?

5. Why does Paul see the Gentile Christians as "debtors" to the Jews? (vs 27)

6. Why do you think Paul called the offering "fruit" in verse 28?

7. Paul also seemed to feel they "owed" it to them to help. Helping the poor was not an option, but an obligation. Are you willing to help the poor, or those who are in need? Do you tend to look the other way or step up to the plate? Read Matthew 25:31-46. When you help "the least of these," who are you ministering to?

8. Read Romans 15:30-33. What does Paul ask from them?

9. Why does Paul call prayer "striving"?

The phrase "striving together" can also be translated "wrestling together." I love this analogy because it is used for an athlete who is "striving" to do his best in a contest. It means our prayer time is earnest and serious and sometimes a battle. Prayer isn't passive but active. We must be engaged with our whole heart, soul, and mind. Don't be fooled. Prayer can be

difficult. John Stott wrote that “Prayer is not like using a coin-operated machine or a cash dispenser. The struggle involved in prayer lies in the process of coming to discern God’s will and to desire it above everything else. Then God will work things out providentially according to His will, for which we have prayed.”

10. How would you describe your prayer life? Is it a struggle at times? Do you pray with fervor and passion? What type of distractions does the enemy seem to throw at you? What keeps you from praying as you ought?

11. I love that Paul asked them to pray WITH him. There is nothing wrong with asking others to pray for you and with you. Why does asking for prayer take a spirit of humility?

12. Is there something you need prayer for but you’ve been hesitant to ask someone for help? How does Paul’s example encourage you to move forward?

That’s it for today. I hope Paul’s examples of giving, wrestling in prayer, being others-minded, and strategic planning has been challenging to you. It has been for me. See you tomorrow!

Fifth Day

Write out your verse from memory.

1. Let's take a few minutes to review some of the themes that Paul brought up in this chapter. Paul wanted them to help those in need in the Jerusalem Church. Do you see your church as a “giving” church, generous, and sensitive to the needs in their community and beyond?

2. There is no place in the Church for selfish ambition and selfish motives. What do you think is the difference between “Gospel Ambition” and “Worldly Ambition”?

3. Are you actively involved in the lives of missionaries, whether it's in going, sending, helping, etc.? Why is this such an important aspect of the local church?

4. Is your church "actively looking" for groups of unreached people? Are YOU actively looking for groups of unreached people? (Not just globally ...)

5. Do you have an active prayer life? Are you praying for lost souls, kingdom issues, your church leadership, those in need, etc.?

6. Very often, people blame their Church for being unwelcoming or unfriendly. How can jumping in and serving with others build strong bonds of friendship and fellowship?

7. If you are involved in any type of Christian service, in what ways can we be tempted to serve in a way that benefits ourselves rather than God, or those He's called us to serve? Have you ever found yourself serving with wrong motives?

8. What spoke to your heart the most in this chapter?

Next week is our final lesson, and we'll be saying goodbye to our dear friend Paul.

I'm going to miss him ...