

week **2** two



Discover

*Read*  
*Romans Chapters*  
*14 and 15*





## Discover

Last week, we discovered that the church in Rome was crafted with multiple expressions of diversity in the community: rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free. Of particular emphasis for Paul is that both Jewish and Gentile Christians were part of the church. According to the names identified in chapter sixteen, we can determine that the majority of Christ followers in Rome were Gentiles. Sheer numbers granted the Gentile followers an advantage as the loudest voice in the community. The Roman empire also granted Gentiles societal advantage and a higher status as compared to the Jews. Judaism was not a favored religion among the Romans; and the Christ followers who were ethnically Jewish encountered the same discrimination and disadvantage, due to their shared ethnic background, as their neighbors and family members who were still practicing Judaism. Can you imagine being among the ethnic minority in your church? Can you imagine possessing a status and influence as compared to others in your church?

This dynamic was not always the reality in the early church because the first Christians were predominantly Jews that became followers of Jesus. It is likely the Jewish Christians present in the church in Rome were once the majority but power shifted as the reach of the good news extended to envelope the Gentiles. To add another layer of tension beyond these shifts between Jews and Gentiles, many of the Jewish Christians did not forsake their religious heritage and still practiced certain aspects of the laws found in the first five books of the Old Testament, the Torah. In our reading this week from Romans chapters fourteen and fifteen, Paul notes dietary restrictions and the observance of certain days as points of conflict. Access to kosher meat was particularly difficult due to the storage and preparation of animals in the marketplaces of Rome making a vegetarian diet the only option for the Jewish Christians still observing certain regulations in the Torah.

Paul uses weak and strong to describe the two factions of the church in Rome. These words are better translated as the “powerful and influential” and “those without power.” These translations reflect the status of these two groups in the church and in their social context. The weak are the Jewish minority that observe aspects of laws of the Torah. The strong are the Gentile majority and potentially Jewish believers who feel free to no longer embrace these restrictions. The table below showcases the distinctions and similarities between the weak and the strong as described by Paul in chapters fourteen and fifteen.

The Weak / The Powerless	The Strong / The Powerful
Eats only vegetables (14:2)	(14:2) No dietary restrictions
Potential to despise the one who eats (14:3)	(14:3) Potential to judge those who do not eat
Some days are more sacred than others (14:5)	(14:5) All days are treated the same
Have their own convictions (14:5)	(14:5) Have their own convictions
Abstains in honor of the Lord (14:6)	(14:6) Observes in honor of the Lord
Neither lives nor dies to self (14:7)	(14:7) Neither lives nor dies to self
Gives an account to God (14:12)	(14:12) Gives an account to God
Called to please neighbor for their good (15:2)	(15:1) Have an obligation to “bear with the weak”
	(15:7) Called to welcome the weak
	(15:2) Called to please neighbor for their good



## Discover

Paul does not demand observance of the laws of the Torah. Paul does not demand these believers reject any restrictions drawn from the Torah. Paul does not demand that these two factions reject their convictions. Paul does demand that these factions pursue peace. To the strong, to those with power, Paul asks to “welcome” the weak, those without power and influence. (Romans 14:1, ESV) “Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” (Romans 15:7, ESV) Paul upholds the incredible humility of Christ as the model for this form of radical welcome necessary for these factions to gather together. Christ “became a servant” to draw to himself both Jews and Gentiles. Christ “did not please himself” but bore reproach for the sake of others.

“

Therefore; welcome one another  
as Christ has welcomed you  
for the glory of God

”

Addressing both the weak and the strong, Paul asks the church in Rome to please one another, to be mindful of one another, to accommodate one another, for the good of the other person. Peace is achieved and unity becomes a reality in this diverse community when each person serves the other in the same manner as Christ who demonstrates radical welcome to each of us.





# Pray

## Monday

Paul's letter addresses two factions, the strong and the weak, in the church in Rome. Paul challenges the strong, those with power and status in the community, to not look down with harsh judgement against the weak. I invite you today to be challenged in the way that Paul challenges the strong. Ask God to reveal to you the ways that you look down on others for their perspectives or opinions that you do not share.

God, I pray that you reveal to me any harsh criticism or malice that I feel towards others who do not share my perspective or opinions. I pray that you will draw out of me any judgement of others in order that I can gather at the table in peace with my siblings in faith...

## Tuesday

Paul challenges both the strong and the weak to pursue the righteousness, peace and joy that characterizes the people of God in the kingdom of God. Paul asks the weak to not despise the strong. I invite you to ask God to reveal to you the ways that you despise or hold others in contempt. Despise is a strong word with a harsh connotation. We may not "despise" others but we often think negatively of them especially if they disagree with our strongly held convictions.

God, I pray that you reveal to me any harsh distaste or derision I feel against another person. I pray you draw out of me any coldness towards others in order that I can gather at the table in peace with my siblings in the faith...

## Wednesday

Romans 15:5-6 reveals Paul's desire for this community. "May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is Paul's vision for this splintered community. I invite you to pray these words over our community as many times as feel necessary.

God, I hold out to you the family that makes up your church in Tempe, Arizona. I pray that you, the God of endurance and encouragement, will allow us to live in harmony with one another, in accord with Jesus Christ, that together we will with one voice glorify you, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is how we will become the resilient church.



# Pray

## Thursday

In Romans 15:13, Paul asks that the “God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” Hope is essential to ensure that we continue to do the work of cultivating peace in our relationships. Conflict, division, and tension will constantly threaten the community and hope prompts us to continue the hard work that leads to peace. Our prayer today is for this hope, this vision of a community at peace.

**God of hope, fill us with all joy and peace in believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit we may abound in hope.” God of hope, show us your vision for the church. God of hope help us cling to this vision in the midst of hopelessness and disappointment...**

## Friday

In chapter fifteen, Paul reminds the strong, the predominantly Gentile majority, that they have every reason to praise God because they were grafted into the family of God. Each of us was invited to be a child of God through Jesus Christ’s willingness to humble himself becoming a servant to the Jews. Today, I encourage us to praise God for our invitation into the family of God. May remembrance of our own invitation spark us to radically welcome others.

**God, I am so grateful that you welcomed me into the family of God. I am so thankful for the humility of your son and the lengths he went to that I might be called your child. I pray that you will show me how to welcome others into your family. Who are you asking me to reach out to with this invitation?**





## Serve

### *Pursuing Peace*

In Romans 14:19, Paul urges the Christ followers in Rome to “make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.” Some translations use the verb “pursue” to describe our active attempt to embrace peace. Peace is not the natural state of our relationships with others. Peace does not simply “happen” to us. Our relationships are constantly threatened by conflict that arises from our actions, our inaction, our opinions and perspectives, our human error, or previous damage. We must pursue peace. We must actively choose peace. Our opportunity to serve this week invites us to follow Paul’s instruction and “make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.” I invite you to reflect on a relationship in your life that is void of peace. Does the image of a friend, family member, or co-worker who wronged you settle in your mind? Does the image reflect someone that you hurt or your interactions concluded in the exchange of harsh words? Are the faces in your mind reflective of a particular group of people or organization that you criticized or exploited through your actions? I invite you to ask God how you can pursue peace in this relationship? What action can you take to usher peace into your strained or broken relationship? How can you make amends?

It is vital to note that sometimes making peace in an unhealthy relationship means that firm boundaries are kept in place. These boundaries may require that you do not interact with this person on a regular basis to protect yourself and the other person from harm. Your way of pursuing peace in this relationship might mean actively working alongside God through any lingering bitterness or resentment you harbor against this person.



## Reflect

The following questions are designed to help you reflect more deeply on the themes we explore together as we journey through Paul's letter to the Romans. I invite you to make space to sit with these questions without any need for a quick or clear answer. As you settle into a quiet and comfortable space, I encourage you to discuss these questions with God. Ask God to prompt you, to guide your thoughts, or bring up new questions that could be more helpful to you.

- 1 What experiences have you had with fellow Christians with whom you do not share the same convictions? Can you identify with the strong or the weak through your own interactions with others?
- 2 Paul challenges both the strong and the weak to gather together despite their differences because the kingdom of God is "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." How can we become a community that reflects their characteristics of the kingdom of God?
- 3 Both the strong and the weak hold convictions and chose to act in a way that they believe is honoring God. In chapters fourteen and fifteen, Paul invites the strong, despite their own conviction, to not force the weak to violate their conscience in order for the church to gather to share a meal. How do we determine when we need to hold fast to a conviction or to choose to restrict ourselves in order to radically welcome another?
- 4 Paul encourages this community to accept one another just as Christ has accepted you. How does our understanding of Christ's acceptance of us challenge our acceptance of others?
- 5 Paul asks the church in Rome to live in harmony by living in accordance with Christ and welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you. How can we welcome others in the same manner as Christ? Who is God asking us to make peace with in our community by taking on the same humility as Christ?





# Embody

## *Mindful Eating with Others*

A crucial point of tension in the church in Rome centered around eating and drinking together. It was impossible for the weak believers to share a meal with the majority that did not abstain from certain foods or ensure the meal was prepared without risking contamination. The majority did not want to be restricted in their eating for the sake of their fellow believers. Sharing a meal with someone is incredibly intimate. Consider all that we share when we pour a glass of tea or pass a bowl of warm bread. We share our lives more freely when we share food and drink. We share our stories, our laughter, our sorrow, our selves when we share a table. But often we do not make the most of the opportunity to deepen our connection with one another when we eat together. Our phones are always an impatient guest distracting us from the conversation. Our schedule demands we eat and talk with efficiency in mind. There are so many distractions that prevent us from being present with one another.

This week, I invite us to share a meal with another person. This meal could be shared in your home, outside at a picnic, in a restaurant, or over Zoom. In order to be more present with the person sharing the meal with you, I encourage you to first pay attention to the food you are eating together. Put away any distractions and share with one another what your food tastes like, smells like, feels like as it enters your mouth or you touch it with your hands. This might feel strange and unusual because we are very conditioned to eating our food without thought and as quickly as possible. We are equally conditioned to sitting across from someone and not giving them our full attention. The goal with this exercise is that focusing our attention on the food we share together will help us be more focused and present with the other person.





# families corner

This week we are studying Romans 14 and 15 together. As you've read in this packet, Paul offers convicting challenges to those with and without power: to be like Christ, not judge or show contempt, and to accept, welcome, and please our neighbor. What could your family do this week to practice this high calling?

## ———— Learning Humility ————

Humility is a central trait for Christ-followers. Humility makes it natural to say, “not my will but yours be done.” You cannot become like Christ without learning humility. Learning humility starts at home. This week, consider offering a full apology whenever you do something wrong and teaching your children to do the same in word and action. To fully apologize is to show repentance. This looks like:

- Calm down. You might need to step away from the situation.
- Admit that you were wrong, that what you did that wasn't right, and say you're sorry (without blaming others or making excuses)
- Say what you could have done differently. “Instead, I should have...”
- Commit to do the right thing the next time. “Next time, I will....”

For more information on helping our children's hearts learn repentance here is a helpful article: <https://thrivingkidsconnection.com/a-correction-tool-that-touches-the-heart/>. Parenting is heart work, not behavior management. We don't want our kids to just do the right thing, we want them to actually have hearts formed like Christ's, which includes incredible humility.

## ———— Showing Compassion Instead of Contempt ————

This week consider helping your children lean into compassion. It is very easy for children and teens (and let's admit even adults) to make another person all bad in our minds. Someone does or says something we don't agree with and we verbally crucify them. This leads to feeling morally superior, which is exactly what Paul is warning against in Romans 14 and 15. We are not to judge or condemn. So what do we do instead? Show compassion. This week, every time your child comments on friends, family members, people on social media or the news doing or saying something “ridiculous” or “dumb”, offer the following questions to help your child consider the way they think about people they disagree with:

1. I wonder what else was going on around that person?
2. What do you think led them to saying / doing that?
3. What might they need to do better?

## ———— Welcoming a Neighbor ————

For older children and teens, read Romans 16 together. Explain who Paul was writing too. Ask what stands out to your child about how Paul addresses those this letter is written to. Share with them the context of Romans from the Discover section above. Discuss how the context of Romans might be similar to and different from our own context. What insights does your child have to share with you?