

Unity and Mission

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[0 : 0 0] I love hearing stories and seeing videos of the strong helping the weak. I was reading one this week of these two men.

This is Matthew Rees on the left and David Wyeth on the right. This is at the very end of a marathon, 42 odd kilometers.

This is with 300 meters left. And have you seen these videos of someone getting to the very end of the race and their legs just turned to jelly?

And they're just collapsing? This is how I feel most days. But this is at the very end. And so Matthew Rees on the left saw his competition and did he think, I'm just going to run over the line, I'm going to take care of myself.

No, he came around the final corner. He said, I saw a runner struggling. His legs were collapsing beneath him. Every time he tried to get up, he kept on falling back to the ground.

[1 : 0 5] I went over to him and said, come on, you can do this. And I tried to G him up. But every time he tried to get up, I realized he wasn't going to make it. I said, come on, we can do this.

We'll do it together. We'll cross this line together. And so he helps him up. But the strong helps the weak. Add a disadvantage to himself.

Just as easily he could have finished the race. Just as easily he could have run past, shouted encouragement and kept going. But no, he goes back and lifts him up and helps him across the line.

How do we use our strength? If you were in that situation, at the end of those 42 kilometers, you've got 300 meters left, and you see a person collapsing on the ground, would you just run past them without even a thought?

Would you shout encouragement? You can do it. I believe in you. Or would you go back and help them at a disadvantage to yourself?

[2 : 1 3] We are all fallen people. We are all strong in different ways. Some of us are physically strong. Some of us are mentally strong. Some of us are financially strong.

But the challenge we face is a desire to strengthen ourselves and build up our own selves. And to not look after others. And there is a temptation of not helping the weak because it's hard.

It'll slow me down. Or maybe, do you know what, I actually consider myself weak, so other people should be helping me. And at its worst, we forget how weak we are before our God.

And how he has built us up and how he has helped us. We are coming to the end of Romans. And it has taken us on a wonderful journey of God's grace to undeserved people.

And how God takes those people and how he breaks down barriers between Jews and Gentiles so that they can worship together. And there is now a picture of what it should look like when they gather together to worship God.

- [3 : 23] Where the strong lift up and build. Where they are accepting of one another. In such a way that it overflows out of love for other people. To be people just like Jesus.
- And then we'll see how this plays out. Not just in individuals. Not just in a local church. But in an international picture with different churches. And so our challenge today as we go through Romans 15.
- Will be to encourage ourselves that we are strong. We are already strong. And we are accepted in Jesus. And that he calls us to use our strength to build up others.
- And to be accepting of others across the world. Let me pray for us as we jump into Romans 15. Heavenly Father, I thank you. That in your strength you have not left us.
- But that in your strength in Jesus you have picked us up. That you have loved us. Help us today as we consider your words to us. Lord, help it not just be an interesting word.
- [4 : 29] Or an interesting part of the Bible. But Lord, help it to change us. To make us more like you. Amen. Today as we have a look at Romans 15.
- There are three points. You can have a look on your app. You can be taking notes on an old-fashioned piece of paper. With the pens in front of you if you like. The three points are, first of all, the strong and accepting.
- The travelling church planter. And the international church. As we go through this. We are going to start in verse 1. So have a look with me at verse 1. Romans 1.
- We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak. And not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbours for their good.
- To build them up. The people with power ought to use their power to build up those who are weak. The strong and powerful aren't to use that power just to build more strength.
- [5 : 31] And to make themselves more comfortable. Previously in chapter 14. Which Aidan preached on last week. Paul spoke about the relationships within the church. And now he's actually extending that teaching.
- He uses this word neighbour. Which Jesus uses. Love your neighbour as yourself. It is not literally just the people in your circles. Just the people who live next door to you.
- Just the people you like. This is a word for all people. Love all people around you. Each of us should not just love. But seek to build up our neighbours.
- We please our neighbour. We look out for their interests. To build them up. And this is a picture of discipleship. This is not just a picture of avoiding conflict.
- Which we could have thought from last week. It's a picture of discipleship. It's the strong looking to build up the weak. But it is not just one way. It is not just I'm strong.
- [6 : 30] You're weak. I'll always be strong. You'll always be weak. I'm the one who's always giving handouts to you. It is a picture of the strong building up the weak. So that the weak would become strong.
- On mind in particular. Were Christians worried about the impact of food that they ate. Whether it would make them clean or unclean. And damage their relationship with God.
- And so the strong who are aware that food just goes into the stomach. Doesn't actually impact our relationship with God. They're to bear with. They're to be strong with. And gentle with those who are weak.
- Building up the weak looks like understanding. Long-suffering and patience. Particularly with all of the different aspects of what Christianity looks like. There are many differences.
- When it comes to our world views. The way we are shaped. And what it means when we become Christians. Aidan last week reminded us that there are some issues.

[7 : 33] That are worth disputing. And some that are not. But the priority of this part is that we are to bear with and love others. We are to accept and love others.

But we do not get this right all the time. Years ago I was leading a group of year 12 boys. And a Bible study. And a new young man joined the group.

And it was exciting. And this group of boys love to get into deep theological discussions. And at one point in our discussion. We were. It turned out that there was a division in the group.

There was the new guy. Disagreeing with everyone else. Including myself. And I would like to say that I gently led him. Patiently heard him.

And over many months worked through his struggle. And what he thought. And I was the strong bearing with the weak. But I didn't. I was.

[8 : 32] I was probably nicely hard. This is what the Bible says. This is what you should believe. And I had all the best arguments.

The best pieces of scripture to back me up. But I. I didn't bear with the weak. I was just strong. And so. He never returned to that Bible study.

And so for us. In this context. When it comes to church. And life. There are many different ways. That we are strong. And we are called to bear with the weak.

There are those who are mentally strong. Financially strong. Physically strong. We have many opportunities to be right. Or to bear with. And love. And this takes a lot of time.

To build people up in Christ. Here is a picture. Of a man named Half Thor. He is. Europe's strongest man. He.

[9 : 30] Was the mountain. In the TV show Game of Thrones. This is not a body. You can grow quickly. Sorry. What was that Leslie?

Not sure. This is. I'll take it off. There you go. The picture off. Not my own shirt. Thank you for. To build a body.

A mountain. Of strength like that. Takes years. And years. And years. It requires the right diet. Putting the body. Under incredible stress.

Damaging muscles. So that they are forced to get better. And bigger. And years. And years. Of training. When it comes to building someone up.

In discipleship. It is not just something we can say. There is the piece of Bible. Why don't you understand it? Bearing with the weak.

[10 : 26] And discipleship. Is something that takes time. We need the right diet. The right diet of the word of God. But we also must be willing for discipleship to take a long time.

And so for you yourself. If you have been feeling frustrated with where you are at. Following God. Or your pain. In that you are not as close to following God. As you want to be. Understand that it does take time.

Come back to God in his word. And know. That we continue to grow in him. Maybe we won't look like a mountain of a man. But we will. More and more look like Christ.

As we grow following him. And the motive here for us. Is in verse 3. Oh it's already on the screen. Verse 3. Even Christ did not please himself.

But as it is written. The insults of those who insult you. Have fallen on me. Jesus is both our example. And our motivation. Even Christ.

[11 : 30] Even the eternal second person of the Trinity. Even the one who is deserving of all praise. Even the very strongest. Did not please himself.

He did not build up his own strength. Or his own reputation. But came to serve. Came to be mocked. Came to be tortured. And killed.

By God's enemies. He did that to serve. And build up. Us. And we are to have the same attitude as Christ.

To be willing to sacrificially serve. And build up. Even when it is costly. Paul builds on this image. In verse 7. With another word.

Accept one another. Just as Christ accepted you. In order to bring praise to God. Accept one another. Those three little words.

[12 : 27] Are incredibly simple. Accept one another. But they are also profoundly difficult. We. As people. Are so good at dividing.

We divide over small and meaningless things. And big and important things. But as soon as church finishes. We'll divide. Some of us will go to the tea line. And some of us will go to the coffee line.

But we are. We are people who are so quick to divide. Let alone Rome. And the church there. Coming out of. Cultural differences.

Between. The Gentiles and the Jews of Rome. Trying to be a people following Jesus together. How easy it is to divide. Over the food they ate.

Or their family background. And yet Paul says to them. Accept. One another. Accept. Take in.

[13 : 24] Receive. Bring this person into part of your life. Accept. And why? Because Jesus accepted you.

Only by knowing that we are first accepted by Jesus. Can we accept anyone. When we attempted to think that we can earn our salvation and acceptance. We can easily compare ourselves to others.

To find out how close we are to God. And so we can think. I'm better than Frank. Or I'm better than John. And so I'm feeling a little bit closer to God. I'm doing a bit better.

And it. Inevitably results in insecurity. A critical spirit. Oh I'm better than these people. And so you. You need to. You need to shape up.

And neither of those. Help us to accept. Others. Instead. We just say. Well you're not doing it right. You're not acceptable here. Because you don't fit the mold. Of what a Christian is supposed to look like.

[14 : 28] Father's Day. Is a wonderful day. To remind ourselves. That we have. A heavenly father. Who has. Accepted us. In Jesus. Who has adopted us.

Into his family. The very best family. Not because of us. Whereas our biological fathers. That well. They kind of. Have to accept us. But God does not have to.

And yet. Because of his great love for us. He adopts us. Into his family. And as John. Started. We get to. Call him Abba. Father. I think. I think this.

To me. Is almost. The most significant part of. This part of Romans. Maybe all of Romans. Maybe. Maybe today. The very best thing. You could do. Is just.

Take these words. And go home. And meditate on them. Christ has accepted. Me. He doesn't leave us.

[15 : 27] He doesn't leave us. To try and build ourselves up. But he accepts me. He accepts. You. In spite of all our flaws. And deficiencies.

Despite our. Struggles with mental health. Despite the. The negative things you say. When you look in the mirror. Jesus has. Accepted you.

You might be sitting here. Thinking. James. You don't. You don't really know me. You don't really know. Who I'm like. I am unacceptable. Father's day.

Is just a reminder. That I'm not a good father. I've got a damaged. Relationship with my father. Surely. Jesus. Can't accept me. But he does. Not because.

We are good enough. Not because. We are acceptable. But because. He is good. Have you caused. Conflict. And division. In your family. Jesus. Accepts you. Have you made mistakes.

[16 : 24] At work. Have you lost your job. Jesus. Accepts you. Jesus. Who knows. All of our flaws. And our hurts. And our pains.

He. Accepts you. Brothers and sisters. I feel like stopping there. I feel like. Do you know what. If there's. If there's any value today. It is just for us. To sit in this.

If we were people. Who went out of here. Knowing. Jesus accepts me. And then we did the first part of this. First. Do you know what. I'm going to accept other people. If we were that kind of church.

That's. That's all we need to be. I'm going to accept. But unfortunately. We quickly forget. That God accepts me. And overlooks all of my issues.

And overlooks all of my sins. And I will be judgmental on other people. And I actually become more judgmental than God. Well God might accept you. But I don't accept you. And.

[17 : 21] And you need to change. When we as a church. Know. How strong Jesus is. And how he builds us up. When we sit in the joy.

And we pray that Jesus accepts us. We have. A wonderful picture. Of what bearing with others. And accepting other people looks like. Regardless of. Cultural differences.

Theological differences. Brothers and sisters. A danger for us. Is that we can be tempted to think. That everyone should look like.

Me. Everyone should have a. A version of Christianity like me. I'm right. Jesus accepts me. And so everyone should look like me. And that assumes that we. Are the perfect Christian.

It assumes that we are right. We are the finished product. And we forget that Jesus is still building us up. To look like him. And the second thing. It assumes that difference.

[18 : 15] Equals. Wrong. The way. People sing. Or pray. Or read their Bible. They do it different. So it must be wrong. But here. Jesus calls us.

To accept. To accept. And understand. Before we correct. This is how the church. Is called to function.

It's called to be on mission. United by Jesus. And where Paul goes after this. Is quite interesting. He says. This is who the church is to be. To be strong.

And bear with the weak. To be accepting of the other. Of others. And when we do this. People are saved. And in the middle. From verse 9 to 12.

We get this list of quotes. Of all of the Old Testament. Paul quotes. Four different parts. That summarize the entirety of the Old Testament. And so when we are accepting.

[19 : 11] God gets glorified. And the nations get to know Jesus. And so verse 9 says. There's praise amongst the Gentiles. Verse 10. Rejoice you Gentiles.

You get to know Jesus. Verse 11. Praise the Lord you Gentiles. Verse 12. In Jesus. The root of Jesse. The Gentiles will hope.

That's where this is pointing. It is not just that we would be an accepting and loving community here. But it would actually be a place where people come into God's family.

From all across the world. Yesterday my entire family did park run for the first time. It is something that has been mentioned far too many times from this pulpit.

But one of the unique things that stood out to my family was how accepting everybody was. Like I'm there running with my two littlest kids.

[20 : 09] And running. Running. Trying to get them to continue moving in the right direction. And there are random people running past. Going great job guys. You can do it. You can keep coming. You can keep going.

Even when we'd finished. One of the little kids we know from this church. Came back and ran with us. The strong bearing with the weak. Running with us. And it's like this is such a wonderful welcoming community.

Accepting us even though that we're very slow. I want to come back next week. What if we were a church like that? A people who were accepting. And caring.

And walking with others. God has been working throughout history. So that the Gentiles. The people who weren't God's people. Could be accepted by him.

To his praise. And to his glory. It's always been God's plan. To accept other people in. And so. We do what God does. We welcome people in.

[21 : 07] Into our family first. Before we. Correct them. Or train them. Or rebuke them. In God's word. This is the heart of God's.

Good gospel to us. That we are accepted. Before we are built up. God accepts the people to himself. Grows them as disciples. And they are to accept others.

Who grow as disciples. It is a non-stop cycle. To see the world won for Jesus. And Paul. Is a wonderful example of this. That's been my.

First point. That's the long point. We've got two short points. After this. The second point. We see Paul. The traveling church planter. For Paul. In response to being accepted by Jesus.

He is going around. Starting churches. Accepting others. And. Going to a people. Who are very different to him. He was a Jew.

[22 : 02] Who'd lived all his life as a Jew. And he's going to Gentiles. Who are very different. In response to God. Accepting him. He joyfully goes to the Gentiles.

Have a look at verse 15 with me. Because of the grace. Oh. Hang on. Verse 15. Because of the grace God gave me. To be a minister of Christ Jesus. To the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty.

Of proclaiming. The gospel of God. So that the Gentiles. Might become an offering. Acceptable to God. Sharing his faith. Accepting others.

And seeing them disciplined. To know and love Jesus. Is not just an add-on. To Paul's life. It is central. To his life. And for Paul. It looks quite unique. It has always been my ambition.

To preach the gospel. Where Christ was not known. So that I would not be building. On someone else's foundation. This is quite an interesting aspect. Of Paul's ministry. He is a unique church planter.

[23 : 03] He is going to places. That were unreached. So he could plant churches. It is pioneering work. There were plenty of Christian pastors.

And teachers who stayed where they were. But for Paul. He went to new places. And planted churches. He went to the places. That were hard. That were furthest to reach.

And this is why. In verse 22. It says. He had been hindered. From going to Rome. Because. There was already a church in Rome. So he doesn't have the same urgency. To go to Rome.

Because there's already Christians there. So I've got to go to these other places. And plant churches. But I want to come to you. And this is truly wonderful. We need people. To be sent out. To do pioneering work.

We need people. To go where there aren't many churches. So that they might get to know Jesus. Now this is. This is key to the reason. Why Sam and Sally Lowe. Left Sydney. There are so many good churches.

[24 : 01] Here in Sydney. You could drive 10 minutes. In any direction. And go past 10 good churches. We are wonderfully blessed. Here in Sydney. It is good. But out of our strength.

Do we just seek to build up. The kingdom of St. Paul's Chatswood. Are we just seeking to build up. And have more and more Christians. Here in Sydney. Now there are millions of people.

Unreached in Sydney. So it is a good thing. But it is also good to support. Those who are going. To places. Where there is great need. And so Sam and Sally Lowe.

Are on the Gold Coast. A place. Which is beautiful. But doesn't have many Christians. And doesn't have many churches. Richard and Ali McGrath. Are in Berlin.

We are going to hear about them more next week. They are in Germany. A country that has a wonderful. Christian heritage. In name. And buildings only.

[25 : 00] From what I hear. Is that there are so few Christians. And Bible believing churches. The McGrath said to me. Just recently. That there are so many Muslims. Moving into the area. They see that Christianity has failed.

Because you have building. After building. After very impressive building. That are empty. And so the people coming in. See the church has failed.

In Germany. Ironically. They ring the bells. They ring the bells. They ring the bells. At 11 o'clock. A call to worship. And nobody goes. It's failed.

There are not vibrant communities of Christians. And so. We want to support. The McGrath. Because they've planted a church. They're raising. Christian leaders.

To be doing that work. They're seeing people come to know and love him. We need to continue. To send trained people. To train people like Paul was. To start churches.

[26 : 01] And so brothers and sisters. Let me ask you. What is God calling you to do? Is it possible? He's calling you to go somewhere out of your context.

Out of your comfort zone. It could be as simple as. Sharing your faith at work. Or potentially. It could be that God wants to train.

And equip you. To go somewhere else. To start a new church. To support Christians. In that place. But we won't all go.

It is good that there is a church here in Chatswood. For the saints to gather. It is good. That we are here. Not everyone is a missionary.

The whole pastoral team. Thinks it is good to be in Chatswood. Otherwise there would not be. A team here to be bringing you the gospel. But while we are here. We get to support the ministry.

[26 : 56] Of the international church. Final point this morning. The international church. Paul talks about this church. In the last part of his letters. And it's often just.

Something we can skip over. But we see this wonderful. Interconnected. International church. Supporting one another. Have a look with me. Verse 23. But now.

That there is no more place for me to work in these regions. And since I have been longing for many years to visit you. I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to see you while passing through.

And to have you assist me on my journey there. After I have enjoyed your company for a while. Paul is planning on going to Spain. To do a pioneering church planning missionary work there.

And he's going to go via Rome. And he's expecting that the church in Rome would support him. To have you assist me on my journey. Whether that's by having helpers to go with him.

[27 : 55] People like Timothy and Epaphroditus. Or just to send him with food. Or money. There is this expectation that the Roman church. Would help church plant via Paul into Spain.

But that's going to come later. Because he's on his way to Jerusalem. Carrying money from the church in Macedonia. Have a look. Verse 25. Now however I am on my way to Jerusalem.

In the service of the Lord's people there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution. For the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem. There had been a great drought and famine in Jerusalem.

And so the church in Macedonia and Achaia. Sent Paul with money to go and give it to that church. Out of their financial strength. They are supporting the churches in Jerusalem.

Spreading support for these fledgling churches. Was so important that Paul. The church planter. He is the one who is carrying the finances. But it's not only financial support.

[28 : 58] But it's prayer as well. Verse 30. I urge you brothers and sisters. By our Lord Jesus Christ. And by the love of the spirit. To join me in my struggle. By praying to God for me.

God is the one who called Paul. He provides for us. So that we can support others out of our generosity. And Paul knows who is the one who is in control of all things.

And he calls on the church to remember that too. For them to be praying. Because we get to be part of the mission that God is on about. And so brothers and sisters.

Today is the first Sunday in mission month. All of September. The focus of this month is on those three words. Give. Pray.

And share. And Romans 15 calls us to do these three things. To share the gospel. The good news that God has accepted us in Jesus.

[29 : 58] Let me encourage you to come to the training this afternoon. Four o'clock on Zoom. Do it from wherever you are. And so we can continue to think. What does it look like to share the gospel with other people? What does it look like to see other people accepted into God's family?

And then come in a couple of weeks time to learn how to read the Bible one-to-one with other people. And so we want to share. But we also want to be praying. We want to pray for the spread of the gospel.

For the church in the Gold Coast. For the church in Berlin. But as a church that we would also take the gospel to our city. And so come next Sunday afternoon as we pray.

There's a guide in the back of the booklet for what you can be praying about this month. And finally this is a season that we would be a church. Just like Achaia and Macedonia and Rome.

That we would be financially supporting the work of ministry across the world. And so we give. We give to the work in Berlin. We give to the work in the Gold Coast.

[31 : 02] God in his goodness to us has made us strong. He has accepted us. And we get to be a blessing to these other churches. And to the people around us.

Let me pray that we would do that. Dear Heavenly Father. Our Lord. I thank you for your great love for us.

That in Jesus you have accepted us. Despite who we are. Despite our struggles and our flaws. And you invite us to call others into your family.

Help us to be an accepting people. Help us to be a people who reach out in love with the good news of the gospel. Not in rebuking and in correcting.

But in generosity of spirit. Lord. And Lord. Out of your generosity to us. We ask that we would continue to support these churches.

[32 : 04] That are doing pioneering work across the world. Lord. Be with them today. Be with the McGraths as they prepare for church. Be with Sam and Sally as they are probably leading church right now.

Lord. Be with them. As they continue to try and build something out of your goodness to them. Be with them. Be with them as they disciple and evangelize.

So that more and more people would come to know and love you for your glory. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.