



ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER: Week 5

Hi everyone! This week we will be diving into what it means to “Accept One Another,” taken from Romans 15:7, which will be your memory verse. Paul said, **“Therefore, accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory.”** (NLT) You can memorize any translation you like. I love this One Another, yet I find it to be one of the hardest to practice. I probably should have done this one first, because it’s crucial to understand that we are called to accept each other in the way that Christ accepts us, and that’s foundational. We first have to understand that concept. So, sorry if I am out of order, but just go with me!

The fact that God has “accepted” me is one of the greatest truths of life. In Ephesians 1:4-6, Paul tells his audience that they were chosen by the Father “Before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us ACCEPTED in the Beloved.” Personally, I’ve struggled with being accepted ever since I was a kid. Never felt good enough, cute enough, popular enough, liked enough ... you name it. Not really sure why, although I have my theories. I accepted Christ when I was 18, and when I heard that Jesus accepted me while I was still in my sins, loved me even when He knew the deceitfulness of my heart, and that He actually valued me, little ol’ me, I was sold. Being accepted into His beloved, into His family, overwhelmed me more than words can express. And although I still struggle with this issue, in my heart, I know it’s true. And knowing that truth daily reminds me to keep my eyes on Him and not focus on my own emotions of insecurities and rejection. We are part of His actual family; I am His daughter. Is there anything more amazing and beautiful than that?

1. Let's start our lesson by focusing on the acceptance we have from Christ. This will be a little bit of reading but so worth it. Please read Ephesians chapter 1 and 2. Notice the words "accepted," "made near," "broken down," "have access," "members of the household of God," etc. Explain what it means to be accepted into His beloved, practically. How does this happen? What are the blessings from it? What's the difference between being dead and alive? Generally, in your own words, what are your thoughts on these two chapters? (Sorry, a lot of questions ... this section is so rich!)
2. His acceptance of us includes His love, mercy, grace, and forgiveness, right? Explain how mercy affects acceptance, how grace does, etc.
3. Read Luke 15:1-10. How does Jesus accept sinners?
4. Read Romans 5:8 and 1 Timothy 1:15. How did Paul see himself? God accepts us despite what?

5. Read John 6:35-37, Romans 2:11, John 3:17, and Acts 10:28-35. To whom does God extend His invitation to salvation and acceptance into His family?

I think we first have to grasp the concept of being accepted by Him fully, before we can extend that acceptance to others. I pray that each of you do. Perhaps, like me, you struggle sometimes with the longing for approval, or fear of rejection, or feeling like you have to achieve something to be accepted or seen as having worth. All people want to be valued, wanted, and dignified. All of us do. But we have to rest in knowing that only Jesus can provide that perfect acceptance that we long for. Not our spouses, our friends, or our families. He knows us and still loves us. Crazy, right? It's because of that great love the Father has for us that He sent Jesus to rescue us from our sins and calls us to come to Him. He invites us exactly where we are and offers a full pardon from our sin. (1 John 1:9)

6. Do you struggle with the issue of feeling “accepted”? Do you feel comfortable enough to share some of your thoughts with the group?
7. How has knowing that you are accepted in the Beloved changed how you walk through life and handle any insecurities you struggle with? If it hasn’t, how can it??

Ok, now let's see how we can translate the concept of acceptance by Christ into accepting “one another.” Accepting one another means to welcome others into your life as Christ welcomed you, without reservation and partiality. It isn't choosing to accept some and not others. It's placing value, significance, and dignity on every person because they have been created by God and are worth it. We are all similar because we are human. We are unique, because we are all created differently, but are all important to God. Jesus looked beyond man-made boundaries of culture, status, and gender. Can we?

8. What are some things that get in the way of accepting one another?
(personality, culture, interests, etc.)

9. Why is it so easy to allow differences to divide us?

10. Is accepting one another a command or a suggestion?

11. Are you willing to accept people because of the value of who they are, separate from what they do? I read this and I've been pondering it all week. "There is a difference between valuing a human *being* versus a human *doer*." Write your thoughts on that.

Never forget that we are all created in God's image (Genesis 1:27) and that Jesus died for all men (2 Corinthians 5:15). A human soul has more value than anything in the world, so as we accept people, they also can see a picture of what it looks like to be accepted by Christ.

12. Often, we are afraid that if we accept someone, it means that we must ignore the person's sin, or approve of everything they do or believe in. Does that ever hinder you from accepting someone?

13. Does accepting someone mean that we agree with their political views or their stance on gender? How can this cause division rather than building a bridge to share the love of Christ?

I recently was studying about justice and read a quote from Lillian Hellman that made me pause... "Since when do we have to agree with people to defend them from injustice?" So true, but it's the same with acceptance. Since when do we have to agree with someone before we can accept them and treat them with value, significance, and dignity? Did Christ wait for me to think and act like He did? Nope.

14. Why is it easier to accept people that think like us? Why do we automatically think acceptance means endorsement? Does acceptance mean we can't stand up for our rights or speak up when we disagree? Discuss your thoughts.

15. According to Romans 15:7, why are we called to accept one another? For what purpose? How does that work?

16. Read Matthew 7:3-5. What needs to be done first before we can accept others? Why? How is humility needed to do this?

17. Have you ever wondered if others have issues with accepting you? In what ways are you unique that might make it a challenge for others to accept you? (How is grace needed on both sides?)

Accepting one another is also receiving others with special care. Read the book of Philemon. It's only 25 verses, you can do it! Remember that the book is really about a slave named Onesimus who somehow got connected with Paul who led him to the Lord. Onesimus decided to go back to his master, named Philemon. Paul wrote this letter to Philemon, encouraging him to receive him back. As you read, pay special attention to verse 12 and 17. Read it before you go to the next question. No cheating!

18. In verse 17 (in the NLT), the word “welcome” has the exact same meaning as “accept” in Romans 15:7. What, then, is Paul saying?

Accepting one another is to receive another person with special concern and value and care. Accepting one another is welcoming them into your life as you would treat someone who is important to you. Basically, Paul was telling Philemon to place the same level of significance and value on Onesimus that he would place on Paul himself. Wow, so cool. We already saw how Paul viewed himself ... the chief of sinners. He obviously had taken the “log” out of his own eye which enabled him to see with more clarity, improved his discernment, and gave him a more spiritual perspective.

19. Are there any logs in your own eyes that are preventing you from accepting someone in your life? Is there someone who you are struggling with accepting? Are there people with other specific “differences” that you struggle accepting? Spend some time searching your heart on this. How can reminding yourself daily of how Christ accepts us help us with accepting others?

20. Generally speaking, how good are you at accepting others? Be honest with yourself.

21. Do you think some people struggle with being transparent and vulnerable with you because they are afraid you won't accept them? Are you ever afraid of opening up to someone else because of that fear?

22. Some people struggle with feeling accepted when they enter a new environment, such as a school, church, or social setting. How can you being more aware of this and going out of your way to welcome them be a game changer for them? (Perhaps you felt like this when you walked into Bible Study!) What are some practical ways you can help put them at ease?

Author Gladys M. Hunt wrote her definition of acceptance and I wanted to share it with you. "Acceptance means you are valuable just as you are. It allows you to be the real you. You are not forced into someone else's idea of who you are. It means your ideas are taken seriously since they reflect you. You can talk about how you feel inside, why you feel that way, and someone really cares. Acceptance means you can try out your ideas without being shot down. You can even express heretical thoughts and discuss them with intelligent questioning. You feel safe. No one will pronounce judgement on you even though they don't agree with you. It doesn't mean you'll never be corrected or shown to be wrong. It simply means it's safe to be you and no one will destroy you out of prejudice."

23. After thinking about acceptance, try to write your own definition of it, using your own words, using Biblical principles, of course. How would you explain it?

Don McMinn wrote, “When we freely accept all people, favoritism gives way to unconditional love, which says, ‘I will be kind to you, despite your behavior. I will greet you although you are different than me. I will not refuse to affirm your worth, even though I disagree with your lifestyle.’ In essence, I will forgive, encourage, comfort, prefer, (and all the other one anothers) you because of who you are, regardless of what you have done or what you will do. This is the same consistency of love that we enjoy from God (Romans 8:38-39). This attitude is essential to consistently minister the One Anothers. Without it, we become pickers and choosers, deciding who is worthy of receiving love and who isn’t. True acceptance will lead us to minister all of the One Anothers to all people.”

24. I want to end with one question, which might be a loaded one. How is Biblical acceptance different than “tolerance” which is a buzz word in our culture?

Praying you have a great week. Go practice this one another! As you memorize your verse, I pray it takes root in your heart and mind as you daily seek to glorify God by showing the world what it means to love and accept one another. May we be used to introduce others to Christ!

