

# Life Group Questions

June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024

**Christ Our Example** – Pastor Ray Harmes-Wiebe – **Romans 15:1-7**

## Note from Pastor Jonathan

Hey Life Groups,

It's already June! I have a few pieces of news to share:

- Many of you are taking a break from regular meetings in the summer. Please let Rufina know when your last regular meeting will be. Also, let me know what activities you have in store for your group, like picnics, day trips, or volunteering.
- My family is traveling to Taiwan for part of June. I'll still provide Life Group questions for those weeks, but they will be shorter than what I normally write.

Pastor Jonathan Hsieh

[jhsieh@willingdon.org](mailto:jhsieh@willingdon.org)

## OPENING QUESTIONS (Pick any you like.)

### 1. What do you think of when you think of strength?

When I think of strength, two images come to mind.

**Alphas.** There's been a surge of alpha males on social media, YouTube/TikTok, and podcasts. They think successful men are strong. They have economic strength from working hard and running their thriving businesses so they can afford luxury cars, clothing, and lifestyles. They have physical strength so they can threaten and beat up any adversaries. They have relational strength so they can tame and sleep with any beautiful woman they want. Having strength isn't enough. They need everyone to know and acknowledge how strong they are. Ultimately, strength is a tool to get what you want and show you're better than others.

Although being alpha is usually associated with dudes, ladies have their counterparts. I'm sure the girls can share plenty of ways women try to look strong and assert dominance over other women.

Ultimately, they aren't strong inside, so they put on an act to feel strong and capable, relying on external validation.

**Sacrificers.** They use strength to sacrifice themselves for the sake of others. Firefighters and police officers have special training, equipment, and authority that the rest of us don't have access to. They use it to rush into burning buildings to save trapped children or run towards gunfire to protect innocent bystanders.

There are plenty of everyday examples. Parents use their economic strength to provide food, clothing, diapers, and toys for their children. A group of friends uses their relational strength to welcome an outsider. They sacrifice their regular fun to accommodate a newcomer. Fit people use their physical strength to help the feeble or disabled to move furniture or carry groceries. (My dad used to loan my brother and me out to church people for manual labor like moving furniture or picking fruit.) Spiritually mature Christians use their spiritual strength to teach children's Sunday school, lead Discovery classes, or pray for visitors. These people see their strength as something that can be poured out for the benefit of others.

### 2. Do you find it easy to accommodate for the sake of others?

We've all been in situations where we've had to accommodate. Maybe you're ready to conquer a hiking trail, but someone in your group struggles to keep up. Would you slow down so they aren't left behind?

What about watching a movie with someone who isn't a native English speaker? Would you pause the movie to explain the dialogue or cultural nuances so they can enjoy it and learn about the culture?

Ever wanted to go out for a meal with a group, only to find that someone has allergies or dietary preferences? Would you work out a plan so everyone can eat together or would you rather just break the group up so you can eat what you want?

#### Romans 15:1-7

<sup>1</sup> We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

<sup>2</sup> Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. <sup>3</sup> For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me." <sup>4</sup> For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. <sup>5</sup> May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup> Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

## LET'S DIG IN

Paul contrasts the **strong** and the **weak**. The word for strong is δυνατός (doo-nat-os), meaning “pert. to being capable or competent ... in general sense, able, capable, powerful ... esp. political power or influence” (BDAG). Strong here isn’t just physical strength, but rather the capability to do or influence. On the other hand, weak is the same word as strong, but with a negative prefix, ἀδύνατος. These people don’t have any capability. We’ll flesh this out throughout the questions.

### 1. How does Jesus help us bear with the failings of the weak?

Let’s look at this passage through the lens of Jesus’ example and the Gospel.

Jesus is the ultimate example of strength. Jesus is fully God (John 1:1-3). He created the world and sustains it (Colossians 1:15-17). The world was created *for* Him, meaning He made the whole world and everything/everyone in it for His enjoyment.

Instead of seeking to please Jesus, their creator, humans rebelled. They wanted to do what they wanted to. Instead of loving God and each other, people ignored God and harmed each other. This is called sin. Because God is morally perfect and always does the right thing, He has to punish evil. Over time, God sent many prophets and teachers to explain God’s laws and the consequences of breaking them. People didn’t listen and continued sinning. As people disobey God, their relationship with God is broken.

The Bible teaches us that rich people are incapable (ἀδύνατος) of entering God’s kingdom (Matthew 19:26). Because of people’s sinfulness, the law is incapable (ἀδύνατος) of freeing them from sin and death (Romans 8:2-3). Although God gave His people animal sacrifices, they were incapable (ἀδύνατος) of taking away sins and only served as a temporary measure (Hebrews 10:4). There was nothing people could do to repair their relationship with God. In contrast, God can save (δύνατος) (Matthew 19:26).

**Love.** Paul connects this passage back to Romans 13 by writing that we have an obligation (ὀφείλω) to bear. In Romans 13:8, Paul says to “owe (ὀφείλω) no one anything, except to love each other”. Since love is the only thing we owe each other, Paul isn’t saying we owe love *and* bearing with failings. Instead, bearing with failings is another way that love plays out.

Jesus set an example. Despite humanity’s constant rebellion, Jesus still loved them (Romans 5:8). Because of His love for us, He was willing to bear with our failings. He was and is patient with us, willing to forgive (1 John 1:9). Praise God that His love is greater than our sins.

All of our actions must be motivated by love. Bearing with others’ failings isn’t some penance we must perform (“Because I was a brat, now I must put up with a brat.”) or a righteous duty (“This is hard, but I must do it!”). It’s not a punishment from God. It’s a chance to demonstrate Jesus’ love to someone who desperately needs it. Often as we love a difficult person, we realize how difficult we were (or currently are!) and how great Jesus’ love for us is.

**Bear with Failings.** The image that Paul paints is of helping someone carrying a burden. Because of someone’s incapability, someone else has to share the load. There’s the connotation of patience to bear a heavy load.

An example is in Galatians. Paul tells us to restore anyone caught sinning and to “bear one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:1-2). When we bear each other’s burdens, we fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:3).

Let's look at Jesus again. When we rebel against God, we must carry the weight of God's punishment, the consequences of damaged relationships with God and others, and the onus of changing ourselves to fit God's righteous standard. It is an impossible burden for us to carry! But God had grace (Ephesians 2:1-10).

Jesus came to earth to live a perfect life. He didn't need to carry His own sin, since He didn't sin. When He died on the cross, He bore God's punishment for our sins on Himself. He also bore the burden of restoring the relationship between ourselves and God (2 Corinthians 5:18) and our relationships with other people. Since we are unable to change ourselves, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to do the heavy lifting of heart change.

Because Jesus did so much heavy lifting for us, we should also do the same for others.

I know it can be hard, so when times get tough, remember to let Jesus carry you (John 15:1-15).

**Please Neighbor.** The word please is ἀρέσκω (aresko), meaning "to give pleasure/satisfaction, please, accommodate." (BDAG). It's going out of your way to meet someone else's needs. So instead of trying to do what makes us happy or what's best for us, we want to do what's best for others.

Jesus experienced life as an infinite deity. I can't begin to imagine what it must have been like. It was a huge step down for Jesus when He became fully human as a baby. If you were in Jesus' shoes, how would you do it? If you're like me, you'd probably pick the Roman equivalent of Jeff Bezos to be your parents. I'd teach and love and do miracles from my palace or mega-yacht. When ministry's done for the day, I'd eat a banquet of the Roman equivalent of sushi, wash up in my private bath while my private musicians play spa music, put on my finest pajamas, and sleep in my luxury bed. All those creature comforts would *really* help me recharge for the next day of ministry!

But Jesus didn't do that. He was born into a lower-income family. Instead of chilling at home, He constantly went out to meet the people who needed Him. He traveled all over to minister to a wide range of people (Matthew 8:19-20). He touched people with gross skin problems (Matthew 8:1-3). He welcomed women who had sold their bodies for sex with countless men (Matthew 21:31-32). He traveled to the hated Samaritans to tell them the Savior had arrived (John 4). Jesus went out of His way for their sake.

Instead of coming to earth and bullying people into worshipping Him, He gave up His time, personal space, and comfort to love, heal, teach, and be present for the sake of others. He sacrificed Himself for the good of others and to please the Father who sent Him (Luke 22:41). Jesus wasn't thinking about Himself.

## **2. If you are currently weak, how can you let others who are stronger carry you?**

Often when I hear people teaching passages about helping the weak or poor or needy, there's an assumption that the audience is strong, wealthy, or capable. Some of you may be in the weak category. You need someone to carry you, but you have some qualms about getting help and support. Here are some suggestions for you.

**Don't be ashamed!** We all have times when we are weak. Many of us may see Pastor Ray or Pastor Vinh on stage and think they must be so spiritually strong. They don't want you to think that, so they regularly share about times they were weak and needed help. I can unequivocally say that all our mature leaders admit and celebrate their weaknesses. It's not because weakness is great, but because that's when Jesus' strength (δύναμις, the same root as δυνατός) shines (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). It's when we're powerless that Jesus gets all the credit.

Although our culture frowns on weakness, we're not ashamed to admit we're incapable! As Jesus said, healthy people don't need a doctor; sick people do (Matthew 9:12-13). We know that every person is spiritually sick

(Romans 3:23) and needs healing. Pretending to not have any weaknesses is as silly as pretending you never use the washroom. "I have no need for a toilet, for I am too pure and clean for making the poops." I know that using the washroom isn't part of everyday conversation (unless you study coprology) and it's gross, but everybody poops. That's part of being human! Everybody has spiritual weaknesses, too, so why pretend?

**Listen for others who share your struggle.** You're also not alone with your specific weakness. Over 3,000 people come together every week at Willingdon. Someone shares your problem. We just had a marriage workshop with a hundred couples all admitting their marriages aren't perfect.

When someone shares a struggle with the group, chime in! Don't hijack the answer, but express that you share the same issue. This encourages them to know they're not alone and opens a door to grow with someone else. It also allows others in the group to come alongside you and carry you. If you don't want to do it in front of everyone, you can always send a message or talk to them after the discussion.

You can join a group that shares the same struggle, such as grief (<https://willingdon.org/griefshare>), learning to be a man (<https://willingdon.org/men>) or woman (<https://willingdon.org/women>), marriage (<https://willingdon.org/marriage>), sexual brokenness (<https://willingdon.org/support-groups>), or a nagging sin (<https://willingdon.org/freedom-session>). We also have pastoral counseling (<https://willingdon.org/pastoral-counseling>). If you don't know where to go, we have a resource center that can help point you in the right direction

### 3. What is the goal of pleasing others?

Paul's desire for the Roman church is **harmony**. We've discussed before that the Roman church had divisions, mainly between Jews and non-Jews. Paul also writes about people with different interpretations of how to follow Jesus (Romans 14). Conflict is a big killer in churches. Take a look at the Corinthian and Galatian churches.

But what makes this harmony different from a club or group of super friends? What's the purpose of that harmony? Paul wants to see the church together **with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**. When we live in harmony, we can worship God together.

If we're too busy judging others, we're not focused on worshipping God together. "Ugh, look at how much skin she's showing." "About time he showed up. He's always skipping church." "Look at these youth, they can't sit still during service. What a shame."

Imagine the opposite, where the church is full of people working hard to support, encourage, and be there for each other. "She may be trying to get attention by what she's wearing. If that's the case, I want her to know that Jesus loves her and we do, too!" "It's been a long time since he's been back. I'll tell him that we miss him!" "I used to struggle with paying attention when I was a teenager. I'll encourage them to do their best." When we look around the sanctuary, we want to see everyone lovingly caring for someone else, being lovingly cared for, or both. That would be an exciting context to worship in. As we all work together, we can glorify God.

If people are struggling with their faith, they may find it difficult to join corporate worship. There have been times when I've been on spiritual life support. I'm overwhelmed with fear, anxiety, dread, or grief and I can't bring myself to praise God. I need someone who's in a better place to come alongside me to encourage, pray for, and be there with me. Let's be there for each other so we can all glorify God together.

As we see our mutual love of Jesus overcome differences, it gives us even more reason to glorify God.

### 4. What can help us to bear with others?

**Scriptures.** Paul mentions two ways that the Bible helps us here. The first is through **instruction**. The Bible teaches us how we can bear with each other and gives us examples. For example, we can see good and bad examples of leaders dealing with the people's failings. We can learn of Jesus' loving patience and ask Him to enable us to imitate Him. We can receive specific instruction on how to patiently bear with people, for example, what we learned in Romans 14.

The second is **hope**. I know it can be hard to bear with people. Sometimes the burden is so much harder than you expected. I'm sure you've said, "This wasn't what I signed up for!" God's Word gives us hope. In the long run, we know we have eternal life in Jesus Christ and nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:37-39). In the meantime, we know that God is on our side.

**God.** By the end of the day, we rely on God. Paul tells us that God provides **endurance** and **encouragement**. Isn't that amazing? God gives us exactly what we need when it gets too hard to love and care for the weak. He isn't the God of key productivity indicators (KPIs) or return on investments (ROIs). He isn't in heaven looking down on us and saying, "You're not strong enough! You're not bearing enough! Work harder!" He made us so He knows this is beyond our capacity. Praise God that He wants to provide supernatural endurance to push on through. And He also provides encouragement. He's a loving Father who wants us to succeed with His help.

So, let's go to God. Let's spend time with God to fill ourselves up with His love so we can pour God's love on others (John 15:1-15). When times get tough, ask Him for guidance and help. As you see progress, make sure to thank God and give Him the credit.

## 5. Who can you bear with?

Are there others who are struggling and need your help and support?

**Pray.** There are too many people for you to bear burdens, so ask God to let you know which He wants *you* to love and care for. You're a finite human being, so you have limitations. And some people may be unwise for you to serve (for example, helping the other gender deal with sexual sins). Who has He equipped you to serve?

**Look.** This person could be your family member, in your Life Group, someone you see at the café, or your child's friend's parent.

Maybe someone in your Life Group is struggling to understand the Bible. Your group's burden could be to slow down to explain what you're studying. It'll take extra work and you won't cover everything you'd like, but it will help them grow and be an outlet for loving patience.

Has anyone shared sins they're struggling with? Lust, anger, not taking God seriously? Listen to their struggles as a co-struggler. Encourage them. They're not alone and Jesus is there to help. Pray for the Holy Spirit to work in them.

Is there someone that's ... annoying? They're not trying to be bad. They just happen to get on your nerves. They unintentionally share a bit too long so others don't have enough time to share. They're a little rude because they don't think about how their words affect others. They're a bit self-centered. You can be patient with them and lovingly guide them back on topic and set an example of love. You can prioritize their relationship with Jesus and let small things slide.

Take a few moments to pray and consider who God might be calling you to love.