

Life Group Questions

June 23rd, 2024

The Family of Faith – Pastor Vinh Doan – **Romans 16:1-16**

Note from Pastor Jonathan

Hey Life Groups,

This will be the last set of questions before the summer! It's been a wild and amazing ministry year. I'll be spending the summer preparing for the next ministry year.

I want to thank everyone again for making our Life Groups ministry possible. I'm so thankful that God has provided so many wonderful leaders and members. I've said it before, and I'll say it again: this ministry couldn't exist without all of you. Praise God.

Pastor Jonathan Hsieh

jhsieh@willingdon.org

QUESTIONS (Pick any you like.)

1. Who are notable Christians who have made an impact in your life and what did they do?

I'm sure all of us are here because God has used other Christians to minister to us. Some may have taught us in classes, comforted us through trials, or set an example through deeds. I bet many young adults can share how older men and women loved them like they were their own kids. Share with the group and take a moment to thank God for them.

2. What descriptions or references to people stand out to you? What does it tell you about them?

Although we don't know much about most of these people, we can infer a lot. For example, when I see **servant of the church** and **fellow workers**, I think of people who humbly serve, just as Jesus humbly served them. They do what needs to be done to spread the Gospel, build the church, and care for the people. If something needs to be done, they're willing to do it. When I see **patron of many**, I think of someone who sees money as a tool to fund ministry. They'd rather spend extravagantly to share the Gospel than on luxury. It's worth sacrificing their material riches to spread Jesus' spiritual riches through missions. When I see **risked their necks** and **fellow prisoners**, I think of people who are unafraid of death because they know Jesus has given them eternal life. They faced a fight or flight situation, but instead of fighting back or running away, they stood their ground and boldly claimed allegiance to their Lord. When I see **approved in Christ**, I think of someone who knows how to teach God's Word (2 Timothy 2:15).

Which one stands out to you? Is there something unique or unexpected? Or do you see an attribute that gets you fired up?

3. Who from this list would you love to meet someday?

These people are faithful followers of Jesus, so we will be together with them someday. Who would you love to get to know more? Who would you love to ask questions to?

Maybe you'd want to ask Epaenetus what it was like being the first Christian in the region and what struggles they faced. Or ask Andronicus and Junia what Roman prisons were like. Maybe you can ask Philologus if people ever got tongue-twisted by his name.

Romans 16:1–16

¹ I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, ² that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.

³ Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. ⁵ Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. ⁶ Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. ⁷ Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. ⁸ Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. ⁹ Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. ¹⁰ Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. ¹¹ Greet my kinsman Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. ¹² Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. ¹³ Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well. ¹⁴ Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them. ¹⁵ Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. ¹⁶ Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

4. How can the women in this list encourage women serving the church today?

On one hand, there are certain roles that God lays out as exclusive to men, such as being elders. Sometimes we emphasize too much on what women *can't* do and not enough on what they *can* do.

It's awesome that Paul lists several women who made major contributions to the Gospel ministry. Phoebe provided monetary support to Paul and others. Prisca (a.k.a. Priscilla) worked alongside him and risked her life for him. Mary worked hard to serve the church; she was no lightweight. Junia was imprisoned for her faith, providing an example of standing firm in the face of persecution. Rufus' mother was like a mother to Paul.

5. What enabled these people to make such an impact on Paul's life?

Ultimately these people were saved by God and enabled by the Holy Spirit to serve Jesus by standing up to persecution, serving the churches, and spreading the Gospel. These people didn't do what they did on their own.

6. Why can it be dangerous to pursue a reputation??

All these people have good reputations. Paul and the Roman church know what they've done. But it's important to know these people didn't set out to be known for these things.

In Jesus' time, many religious leaders were all about reputation. They looked good on the outside, but inside they were spiritually dead (Matthew 23:25-28). That's true today. There has been a dishearteningly consistent pattern of Christian leaders having scandals (e.g., adultery, physical/spiritual abuse). It's most often because they pursued a reputation (like being a great preacher, visionary pastor, celebrity) instead of faithfully following God. Many of us have seen similar problems in our Christian communities. We may know leaders who have the reputation of being amazing but are hypocrites.

A solid reputation without a relationship with God and a character shaped by God is like an empty shell. It may look strong and amazing from the outside, but it'll eventually collapse. Besides, what good is it to have an amazing reputation among people but not know God?

7. Who are our modern-day equivalents?

As you read through this list, who are the people in our church who are the same? Can you think of people who generously give money to fund our church or other ministries? How about people who risk their reputation or income for the sake of Jesus? Do you know of whole families that serve God together? I bet a lot of you know of women and men who act like mothers and fathers to many in our church.

8. If Paul wrote to your Life Group, how would he describe the members of your group?

I hope you have seen people in your group faithfully serving God. Encourage them by pointing it out! Let them know how they've made an impact.

9. How would you like to be commended and why?

I don't think any of these people did what they did to get a shout-out from Paul that would be read by people all over the world for 2,000 years. They learned about what Jesus did for them and dedicated their lives to Him. In other words, they faithfully followed Jesus.

As you look at your life, how do you think Paul would mention you? Or would he mention you at all?

I used to want to be famous and work my way up to be a big public preacher. I wanted to command respect for being such an amazing leader and teacher. I wanted everyone to know what an amazing pastor I was. Thank God that He humbled me.

Over time that vision has shifted. A while ago I was touched by Joseph, who was nicknamed Barnabas (“Son of Encouragement”, Acts 4:36). I want all that I do for Willingdon, my family, and others to encourage people in /towards/for Jesus. I have a long way to go but thank God He’s working on me. If I’m known for something, I’d love to be known for being a godly encourager.

10. What can you work on to grow towards a commendable character?

Everyone’s reputations were founded on their character. Who they were led to what they did. Too often we try to bypass character and do things. Before we can do things for Jesus, we need to be shaped by Jesus first.

Here are some suggestions:

- Make sure you know the Gospel and remind yourself of it regularly.
- Develop your spiritual disciplines like prayer, Bible reading, corporate worship, or confession.
- Identify sins that you need to confess and deal with.
- Find role models. Find followers of Jesus who exemplify the character you want to build.