**Room To Fail**

**Romans 15:1-7**

January 26, 2020

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***1*** *We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.* ***2*** *Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.* ***3*** *For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.”* ***4*** *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.* ***5*** *May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus,* ***6*** *that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.* ***7*** *Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.*

If you try to search for the longest lasting band, you will discover that the answer is not so easy to find as you think. Plenty of musicians form bands that last for decades, but for most of them there is a qualifier. Almost all of these bands have lost or traded at least one, if not all of their members throughout their time in history. If you’re looking for a band in which all the original members are still together, the pool of eligible candidates decreases dramatically. There just aren’t that many bands that last. They form with great intentions, but group after group ends up splitting for all sorts of reasons, many of which are simply personal preferences. It doesn’t matter how tight the band is, how popular they become or how lucrative their prospects, staying together in reality is incredibly rare. Simple personality clashes, little artistic disagreements, a few thoughtless comments, and the band just falls apart.

When opinions over non-essential matters reign supreme, groups become unwilling to work towards agreement. And when people want different things and refuse to patiently bear with the weaknesses of one another, when there’s no room for failures in maturity, any group is doomed to break apart. It’s not just bands that don’t last. Friendships drift. Sports teams restructure. Restaurants close down. Companies go bankrupt. Coalitions disband. Collectives collapse. Unions implode. Political parties fragment. Nations topple. Empires dissolve. If it involves people, the idea of lasting togetherness is incredibly fragile because humans are opinionated. Our opinions are different. Our differences are natural and our nature is depraved. And unless something supernatural happens, when we come to different conclusions about these disputable matters, our natural reflex will always be to break away.

Few experiments of togetherness seem more doomed to fail than this early church in Rome. It’s an unstable mix of different cultures and backgrounds that is like a chemical reaction just waiting to explode. Jews and Gentiles are thrown together under one banner, claiming to be followers of Jesus. It’s not a small thing. The Jews are probably the more conservative. They’ve spent centuries setting themselves apart from other nations, meticulously observing ceremonious regulations and avoiding Gentile customs. The Gentiles are the more liberal. They’ve come from varied backgrounds of customs and some from blatant idolatry, while the Jews had committed themselves in some ways to self-righteousness. There are just different problems, different people, different backgrounds all joined together now under a common belief that Jesus is the Savior of the world and that He is the sole solution to their problem of sin. And so they come together. But this novel social experiment is not without challenges. Conflict is brewing. Paul loves this church and he wants to remind them of what unites them, and encourage them to live in harmony with each other. So stakes are high for Paul. The large church here is a test case for the power of the gospel. The question is can this message of hope and reconciliation really do what Paul is claiming? Is it really the power of God to salvation?

Sin separates. It always separates. We experience that. It separated man from God. Adam and Eve and their relationship, Cain and Abel, and on throughout Scripture, we see sin separates. And yet, God is a God of unity, of oneness. And He is a God who we see through Jesus actually as one who restores and reconciles relationship. He heals to bring peace. And the good news is that peace and reconciliation is available, but the reliability of this message is at stake.

Paul uses the beginning of the letter to describe what God has done in bringing them together and in reconciling them to God and to each other. He transitions in chapter 12 and starts getting into the mess of life. He’s not afraid to wade into the deep waters of politics and disputable matters. The idea of togetherness is front and center. There are small disagreements and squabbles over controversies over which the Bible is silent. And this idea of togetherness feels threatened. It may seem easy in the beginning, but as time passes, preferences and opinions begin to rise and friction is bound to occur. And in the end, we discover that all these issues are like parts of a machine that only last through the friction when they’re drenched with a gracious dose of longsuffering love. Togetherness is an incredibly fragile gift that cannot last without that ingredient. Longsuffering love!

Love is about giving. To love biblically is to sacrificially give of yourself for the eternal good of another. And longsuffering love is that kind of love that is patient in spite of trouble caused by others. It’s willing to endure pain, mercifully forbearing the immature failings and weaknesses of others. Wherever there is a void of that kind of longsuffering love, we watch togetherness fail over and over again. And that kind of love is not a natural thing. It doesn’t just come up within us on its own. Our natural reflex is to draw away from pain and suffering and weakness of others. And as beautiful as togetherness sounds, it sort of feels like an exquisite ice sculpture. It’s a concept we can form, but in the heat of life, it’s doomed to melt into a puddle of tears. You wonder if it’s actually even possible. Paul believes it’s worth fighting for. He believes in the power of the gospel and that at the very heart of this message is the idea of togetherness. And there’s only one way it lasts. It’s through a healthy dose of God-glorifying, Spirit-empowered, Christ-centered, life-changing, longsuffering love. Togetherness won’t last without it. It’s a necessary part of following Jesus together in a way that lasts.

So the question for us is do we have that kind of love here? We say we’re following Jesus together, but are we doing life together in a way that can last? Are we experiencing and expressing longsuffering love? I believe this is a matter for prayer and reflection for us all. Sometimes we’re able to study passages that we feel we’re excited about and we’re doing well in. Other times, we preach passages that may look ahead or look back. I believe here is one that we discuss today that we need to bring our hearts before the Lord and ask for help. I believe this is one that God would have us think about this day.

What does it look like to show longsuffering love? It doesn’t happen automatically. It’s not natural, which means that if we’re in neutral, we’re actually not just not helping it move forward, but we’re actually allowing it to decay. Naturally we’re drawing back. It takes intentionality to move into togetherness. And if we’re not thinking about it and we’re not stoking or fueling or kindling this flame, we’re actually stifling and suffocating it. Are we working for togetherness or against it? We’re either contributing toward that kind of culture or we’re corrupting it. There’s not neutral ground. So if we want together to last we can’t miss this lesson. This message from Paul is superintended by God and preserved for us so that we can experience together that lasts. And if you say, “I think I want to be a part of that. I want to know what God would have to say to me to contribute to that kind of culture,” here’s what longsuffering love looks like from Romans 15. Here are a few ways that it shows in our lives. Here are some actions against which you can compare your own heart and say, “Here are ways I can take steps toward that kind of love.” Let’s unpack them in turn. First, longsuffering love begins when we

**Dethrone Yourself: Whom it Concerns (1a)**

If you want to follow Jesus with a togetherness that lasts, you have to dethrone yourself. And what I mean when I say that is that you remove your own desires and preferences from the position of supreme authority and rule in your heart. You take them off the throne and instead enthrone God. Another way to say it is to die to yourself or set aside self regards, and in love, you put others first. To do that in the context of together for any length of time with all sorts of people who don’t share your opinions, it takes a love that is very longsuffering. And that’s a responsibility that we need to embrace. It’s something that we need to do, especially those who are more mature. It’s a self-denying love.

Some time ago, one of my children said, “I want to be a grown up. I want to be in charge so then I can do whatever I want.” (Laughter!) Why are you laughing? Don’t grownups do whatever they want? They miss the idea a little bit of what being in charge is really all about. Being the mature one in the group, the strong one, the influential one often means giving up your preferences to serve the others. Being a parent is an example of that kind of responsibility. You have the freedom. You’re an adult. You’re in charge. And yet, it’s your duty to show longsuffering love in the care and bear with the immaturity of your children as they grow. And here, Paul describes our responsibility to show longsuffering love by dethroning our own desires in order to patiently care for others. Look at verse 1. There’s a bold exhortation for us to heed here.

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

It’s longsuffering love by those who are strong. Paul includes himself in this responsibility. We have to show this kind of love. And when he says, “We who are strong,” he’s not talking about physical strength. He means spiritual maturity. It’s those who rightly and soundly understand the truth about their freedom in Christ. There was a controversy that Paul has been addressing where there has been disagreement over what God required when it came to what food they could eat. There were some who looked back to old regulations and their consciences were pricked and they weren’t sure that they could participate in certain foods. Paul engages in the entire conversation. And in the end, he is referring to the people who understand the freedom that they have in Christ and those whose consciences are rightly informed over this disputable matter. They understand what is going on. They’re spiritually mature. And what Paul says is they’re obligated, they bear the responsibility to actually serve the other. They’re obligated to put the others first in a longsuffering loving way, to bear with and to not self-please.

What does it look like to dethrone our desires and fulfill this command? There are lots of places we could go, but in this passage, there are a few strategies that surface for us to begin with. First, if you want to dethrone yourself in the way Paul describes and have this kind of longsuffering love, then you need to surrender your claim to autonomy. Surrender or give up your claim or right to autonomy. We can say independent freedom. Autonomy is that I can assert control or influence over myself and others. I can do what I want. That’s the natural mindset of our flesh. It’s natural for us to say, “My freedom is for me. I am the one who is in charge.” Have you ever thought that? “My freedom is for me. I can do what I want. I’ve been set free and so now I’m free to do what I want.” Mature followers of Jesus come to realize that Jesus fulfilled the law. Yes, He set them free, but their freedom is not without a responsibility. It’s actually given so that they would love. They’re free to love. And so here there is a call to surrender our claim to autonomy and recognize that we’re here to serve, to love. We dethrone ourselves and serve.

I used to wake up in the morning, look in the mirror and see hair. And over time, all of a sudden I started to realize that it’s going away. And now it’s gone. And there’s another thing that happened, though. I used to look up and I’d start to see this crown on my head when I wake up every morning. It’s invisible. You may not see it, but this crown identifies me as the center of the universe. I’m in charge of everything and it’s all about me. I have to recognize everyday I wake up with that crown. I have to take it off and acknowledge that I’m not the center of the universe. Jesus is! I have to acknowledge the true king. I dethrone myself and I recognize and surrender the claim to autonomy and thinking my freedom is for me. I realize that no, this is about loving others. It’s about Him. And part of doing that means that second, we have to abandon our dreams of ease.

It’s very natural for us to think community should be easy. Have you ever thought about that? Have you ever thought, “Man, everything would be easy if it just wasn’t for this person or this issue. If everybody thought like me, this would be so easy. If we just sang this kind of music or if we just sort of turned the volume up or down to this level, if we all just did this or had the service at this time, then it would be a lot easier.” We recognize that community is anything but easy. When you read the New Testament, you realize that it’s not an easy thing. It’s not natural. It’s a supernatural gift that has to be zealously defended because it’s always going to be under attack. There’s a call to abandon that dream of ease and recognize there are going to be weaker brothers and sisters who don’t have quite as much experience or knowledge of the Scriptures. There are going to be failings. There are going to be immaturities. If we’re doing our job and inviting people to come follow Jesus, there is going to be a constant inflow of people who add to the mess. I add to the mess and as people come in and bring more mess, we realize that we’re surrendering or abandoning our dream of ease. We’re ready for what God has and it’s not going to be easy. And what that means as we move forward is we’re going to shoulder the weight of immaturity. Our responsibility, for those who are seeking to follow Christ and spiritually discerning what He is saying here, is that we shoulder the weight of immaturity and the burdens that others carry. This means we can’t say, “That’s not my problem; it’s their problem.” This idea of carrying, like carrying something like a bucket filled with water, this is an effort. We’re bearing their burden with them. And these are spiritual muscles that will stretch.

Two muscles come to mind. First is the muscle of mercy. It’s that we would bear with them in their failings and support their burdens with them. And then there is the muscle of humility. It’s that we would not please ourselves. It is that we would seek the good of others and please the Lord. We see that mercy and humility can be stretched to the limit as we try to shoulder that weight together for others. All of this comes together just to say we have to dethrone ourselves. Longsuffering love is our responsibility. And this is how we enter into it. And we recognize that following Jesus is not a call to get what we want, but to give it up. It’s not a call of entitlement or convenience or indifference toward the mature, but it’s a responsible duty to bear with the hard to deal with brother or sister with longsuffering love.

Think about Jesus’ longsuffering love. God was so longsuffering with Adam and Eve in the garden. He was longsuffering with Israel in the wilderness, with individuals or the nation. And then even in their rejection of His personal arrival. The disciples were arguing over who was better and He was just longsuffering. He addressed sin, but there were so many ways that He sacrificially loved. And think about this. He is the only one who belonged free of that mess on His throne of joy. And yet He willingly came down, descended to live amongst us in the mess and even die, bearing the consequences of our mess. That’s the example and that’s the kind of love that God calls us into.

Ask yourself what sort of desires do you need to dethrone? And then think about this. What sort of desires have others dethroned for you? What sort of desires are others dethroning for you and have longsufferingly borne with you? Rejoice over that. Praise God for others who love us in that way and then pray for God to teach us to do the same.

When we look at this example that Paul gives of the meat sacrificed to idols and whether or not they could eat it, it feels kind of obscure and we think, “Why would God give us that example? It’s super not relevant, it feels like.” I think perhaps he is making a point so effective that we’re experiencing it but not understanding it. Because throughout church history, there are always going to be examples of controversial issues that in the end, it’s not so significant about where you land but how you deal with it. And the whole point is the things that matter so much to us and that seem so controversial in the end, the relationship is so much more significant. Here is God talking about dethroning ourselves to show longsuffering love. But He goes deeper in verse 2 and describes what this means. It means we

**Invest In Others: What It Looks Like (1b-2)**

If we want togetherness to last, we have to invest in others. Invest means to give of our time or our money or our energy or our effort. That’s the role that we play in showing this kind of love. We invest in others.

How are your New Year’s Resolutions going? Is anybody still tracking? I know there is always that season in January where the gym just sort of floods with all kinds of people and workout plans and such. There are two ways to approach working out. There are those who just walk into the gym on their own and start doing things, and there are others who sign up for the class and participate with a group. I typically was always one who just went on my own. I remember many years ago in high school, I would go in and try to figure out what to do. I’d try to look like I know what I’m doing. I put some weights on this bench press and I’d start to lift. I just put too much on there and I got stuck. It was slowly coming down on me. It was 30 seconds of just, “I’m going down.” And no one was there to help me. There were people, but they didn’t come over. My only option was to sort of dump it this way and half the weights come off. Thankfully, no one got hurt. I sat up. And no one came over to help me and I didn’t really get upset and they weren’t upset at me because we didn’t actually have any expectations of each other. We hadn’t made any kind of commitment to each other. Everybody was just on their own. And I just left and I didn’t go back to the gym for weeks out of embarrassment and shame. But if you sign up for a class, there is an expectation that you have of other people. If you’re starting to struggle, there is an expectation that someone would come and help you. You’re in this together. You’re participating. You’ve made a commitment. And you’re here. Yes, you want to work out and you want to grow, but there’s a commitment that you’re together and you’re going to help each other and invest in each other.

There’s a difference between just coming to church on your own, “I’m going to get better and spiritually grow and do some kind of spiritual body building,” and saying, “I’m participating with a body, and there are members, and there are expectations we have on each other.” Sometimes there are people in the church and in life who are just struggling under the weight and it’s easy to just sort of glance over as if we don’t have expectations on each other. No, we have to invest in each other. Paul is saying togetherness only lasts when we actually invest in each other. There is a sacrificial ethic here we have to adopt.

***2*** *Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.*

It’s not just the teacher or the leader who is investing. Everyone is investing in his neighbor. This is the role that each of us are called to. And the encouragements are that we would embrace our part in the role. It’s a commitment we make to invest in others, each of us with our neighbors. We recognize that our time, our effort, our energy, our resources should be flowing outwards to others. And when we do so, we honor the intent of this role. We’re not pleasing our neighbor for our good. We’re not puffing him up with flattery or insincere compliments. Paul is not calling us to be a fleshly man-pleaser. He talks about that elsewhere in Galatians. It’s Gospel compromise; that you’re just trying to please people. No, we have to say the truth. We have to be loving. We have to confront sin and we do it with humility and gently. And we’re gracious because we realize that we too are tempted and we fail often. But that’s not what he’s talking about here. He’s talking about honor the intent of this role, which is to act out of a heart for their good and with an intent to build them up. This is a constant building project, a building campaign that Paul invites us all to. Be a part of the building campaign. There are no bricks here, though. It’s building into people. Have you invested into that building campaign of the church growing? This is the role that we need to embrace; helping and investing in others. We embrace our part and honor the intent. Let’s continue and look at verses 3 and 4. Longsuffering love means that we also

**Rehearse the Truth: Why it Matters (3-4)**

If we want togetherness to last, we won’t do so if we don’t continually rehearse the truth. It’s to say it over and over, to run it in your mind again and again until it begins to stick. Thinking about what is true, what God has said and done through Scripture. And this is what motivates us, what serves as our reason to show this kind of longsuffering love. Someone said “if you lose your why, you lose your way.” You need to remember why this kind of love is our duty. Paul looks back at what has happened and been given as a motivation, a reason to do so.

One of the things we learned in my home early on was to never say the phrase, “I’m bored!” Even worse was to say, “There’s nothing to do!” Mom knows there is always something to do. Worse yet was to say, “My life stinks!” or “I’m done with my sibling!” Comments like that would earn you an instant reality check. Mom and Dad would start to explain to you what mom does on a regular basis and then you realize there are some lies and self-centered thoughts that have distorted your reality. And then just a few simple truths can snap you back instantly. And if those truths didn’t work, then other instruments would. These kinds of truths are the kinds of truths that you rehearse in your mind about the sacrificial love of your parents and give you actually, a realistic perspective of the love you’ve been given and why you need to enter into it as well. Those truths keep you from saying something or doing something you’re going to regret.

In our home, we sometimes ask our kids to clean up for their younger siblings. It’s easy to say, “Why me? I didn’t make that mess.” But sometimes we give them a bit of a reality check. Let’s talk about what your mom does for you. And you recognize, “Oh, yeah, that’s right.” There’s a truth that gives perspective. If we want to show this kind of love, we have to maintain perspective by rehearsing the truth. We see in verses 3 and 4, the reason that we remember to show this kind of love.

***3*** *For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.”*

It’s a powerful example for us to behold! And Paul goes on in verse 4.

***4*** *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.*

He thinks first about the truth about Christ. There are a few truths that we can rehearse that give benefit and help us to show this kind of love. The first truth is just the truth of the cross. Jesus came not to please Himself.

***3*** *For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.”*

It was prophesied in Psalm 69 about the agony that He would experience by bearing the insults and shame that was heaped up, that was directed at God. He would bear that shame and also He would take our sins and be punished by God’s wrath on our behalf. It’s Jesus’ longsuffering care for His people. And thinking about the truth of the cross drenches us with the love of Christ and inspires us to worship and exalt in our Savior. It transforms the way we think about others. We rehearse the truth of the cross and the truth of the fall.

We remember sin, and that we live in a world that is broken. Scripture points us from the beginning and all throughout, the truth of the fall and that we live in a broken world. And Scripture, through that, challenges us toward the resolve that we require. It gives us endurance. We exalt in the Savior, but in verse 4 we’re told

***4*** *For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance*

And not only the fall, but we rehearse the truth of grace that strengthens us with the comfort and encouragement we need. You see, we endure as we recognize this is a broken world and it’s a big mess, and Scripture tells us that. But it also encourages and tells us there is hope and that God is with us and that we can look forward to a future and we’re encouraged. Rehearse the truth of grace in the midst of a mess, the comfort that we need, and that all of this builds toward the truth of glory. In the end, these Scriptures secure our hope for the future.

*and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

The endurance and encouragement that would come from truth, that we might have hope. Paul says, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” One day, everything will be made right and it will be beautiful and good and we’ll enjoy that. That’s the benefit of expectancy. It’s that salvation will be completed and finalized in glory. It’s the expectancy that there is no more sin or separation ever again. That’s a truth we need to rehearse. The cross, the fall, grace, glory; we tell each other these things. Paul says talk about them. Keep saying these things to each other. They remind us of who God is and who He has revealed Himself to be through Jesus. And He gives such longsuffering love to us so that we would remember the reason we’re able to show longsuffering love to others.

Jesus told a parable about a servant who was forgiven an unpayable debt and shown unimaginable love by his master. But then he goes and demands a payment of much lesser debt to someone who owed him. That servant was condemned for failing to remember the truth. He didn’t rehearse what had just happened and the reality of the forgiveness he had received. If he had, he would not dare have done what he did. And we dare not do the same. We rehearse the truth of the love we receive so that for us, we have strong reason to extend that kind of longsuffering love to others.

If you feel like you’re being tested and you’re unable to show that kind of longsuffering love, these are the truths to rehearse. How are you at rehearsing these truths? What kind of conversations or texts or chats or social media posts or entertainment or input, what kind of things are you doing to either help or hurt these truths being rehearsed in our hearts and minds? We need these gospel truths to saturate our hearts so that we respond the way that Jesus does with us. That’s the only way together can last. It’s our responsibility to bear. It’s our role to play. We receive it from Jesus and He gives us reason to do so. That’s whom it concerns. It’s us. It’s what it looks like, why it matters. Here’s how it happens. This is our resource for showing longsuffering love. It only happens as we

**Appeal for Grace: How it Happens (5-6)**

To appeal is to just make a serious or urgent request. It’s to ask, to pray to God for help. He is our resource, our provision for this kind of longsuffering love.

You can look online and find all kinds of examples of how to make a legal appeal. It’s complicated and it’s daunting. The advice there is detailed. One of the best ways is to look at a good appeal that has already been made. And right here, we have an appeal that Paul makes to God that serves as a model for us to learn from. There are some reminders we can draw from Paul’s appeal to God, this hopeful appeal that he makes.

***5*** *May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus,* ***6*** *that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

This is a seriously hopeful prayer. Paul makes such a prayer that it almost seems unrealistic. And yet, he offers it without shame. This is something supernatural he’s asking for in the midst of this chemical explosion we’re expecting with Jews and Gentiles. I think it’s something we can relate to. With all the opinions and backgrounds that we have here, can we really ask for something like that? We have some reminders that we can draw from so we can make the same kind of appeal.

The first reminder is just to remember who is listening. Think about who God is and what He does. Paul knows who God is, the identity God can claim. He is the God of endurance and encouragement. That’s what we need through the Scriptures. And that’s actually who God is. He is a God of endurance and encouragement. And remember the mysterious power that God holds. He is the one who grants the kind of harmony that we would seek. He is the one who holds that power. He would grant it. And so, when we appeal we appeal expectantly from this God. We know He is the kind of God who gives endurance and encouragement, and He’s the kind of God who has the power to grant it. And then we remember the vision that He has. Not only who He is and what He does, but what He wants. We see in Paul’s heart here God’s heart, what He wants.

***5*** *May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony*

This is the vision. It’s that we would live in harmony. We appeal specifically that we would live in harmony. And not just harmony, but such harmony. It’s like when you hear voices singing together and all of the sudden it just resonates into such a harmony that it captures your heart. And then there is this surprising design about who God uses with one another. You can insert the name of anybody in here. The prayer is that we would be in such harmony. This is the surprising design. Us together? With one voice? How is that possible? Here’s how God works. This is the clear tone that He sets. It’s the key. He says

*in accord with Christ Jesus,*

He is the tuning fork to which all of us set our key and then we sing trying to align our own hearts with Him. We don’t have to run around trying to fix each other or trying to align or tune each other’s…No, we tune ourselves in accord with Christ Jesus and such harmony will result. It’s what Paul prays for here. We remember the vision. We pray specifically for that and we remember the ultimate objective. We know who is listening, what the vision is and the objective. We appeal reverently that the ultimate outcome is why God cares. He cares that He would be glorified.

***6*** *that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

It’s that everyone would celebrate and say, “God is amazing! Jesus is awesome!” For that to happen, we have to appeal for grace. We desperately need grace! This is something only God can grant. I have no answer for this. We desperately need the grace of God! We desperately need people who are willing to give themselves to making this sort of appeal. Without it, together will not last. We appeal for grace and we do so by remembering who is listening. Remember the vision and the objective. It’s in God’s design. And so we pray.

How are you at appealing for this grace? Praise God, I know people who constantly reach out and remind me and others that they are praying. Thank you! We need that! And I recognize when I look at my own heart, that there are times when I’m tempted to give up, when I’m tempted to feel like it’s out of reach. And even in the worst times, I’m tempted to say that this person is beyond the reach of us being reunited or reconciled. And then I try to think and scheme in my mind about how to bring about human reconciliation. And I have been undone. God has proven that I cannot do that. We need grace. And because we believe in the power of the Gospel, we believe that is not beyond reach. Reconciliation is possible, but we need to appeal for God to do it. We need people fervently making this appeal because togetherness is constantly under attack and longsuffering love is no small thing. Last, we express longsuffering love in order to

**Showcase the Gospel: What it Yields (7)**

To showcase something is just to display it prominently, to put it out front, to make a big deal about it. My daughter just had a field trip to the museum. When we go to museums, they have big signs and they kind of direct you toward one particular area where they have a feature that they’re showcasing; some artifact or piece. It’s behind glass and there are big lights and it’s shining. They make sure that whatever you do, you notice this thing. And that’s what we need to do with the Gospel. As Jesus followers we need to showcase and highlight the beauty of the good news of Jesus on display and invite people to behold that. And togetherness is at the heart of that because what God is doing is bringing God and man together, and then bringing man with his fellow brother and sister together so that we would be reconciled. And longsuffering love is intended to yield this kind of glorious good news. That’s why Paul says in summary, this is the practical effect we seek.

***7*** *Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.*

Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you. How do we achieve that? How do we showcase the love of Jesus? Well, here are three ways to do it. First, commit to a gospel stance toward others. In verse 7 Paul says

***7*** *Therefore welcome one another*

This isn’t a defensive stance. It’s not a self-protective or even attacking stance. This is a stance of open arms, of eager love. It’s used of conversations where people walk up and they take someone aside and they welcome them and draw them in. It’s the kind of love that Paul would talk to in terms of Philemon and Onesimus and the kind of welcoming, “As if I were there, you need to welcome this brother or sister.” It’s a welcoming gospel stance. We’re ready for that kind of welcome.

In sports, you have this athletic stance where you’re ready prepared. And here, we’re not ready prepared to attack, to fight. We’re ready prepared to welcome. That’s a gospel stance. Commit to it. And second, cultivate a gospel mindset. Cultivate a gospel mindset about yourself. We have a gospel stance about others and a gospel mindset about ourselves. He says

***7*** *Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you,*

Never forget or overlook what Jesus has done in welcoming you. While you were yet a sinner, Christ died for you. That’s the mindset that we need to maintain. And then last, appreciate the gospel stakes. Here is what is at stake in the church, in verse 7.

*for the glory of God.*

This is what’s at stake. Togetherness. This is why it’s under such demonic attack. And why each of us need to look to our own hearts and pray and appeal for God to give grace so that we would bring Him glory as a church. We need His help to do so. There’s no other way to follow Jesus without this being the chief aim and result. The glory of God displayed in big ways through longsuffering love.

The first time I remember receiving an F as a grade, I didn’t even know what an F was. I think it was some kind of spelling test or something in second grade. But my seat buddy on the bus knew what an F was and he said it was bad. Really bad! I was going to get in big trouble. I didn’t know what that meant but I trusted him, so on the way home I buried my paper in the dirt. (Laughter!) Eventually, the truth comes out. I confess to my mom and then I experience a patient, longsuffering love teaching me things I didn’t fully understand. It was nothing like what my friend described. Clearly he didn’t know my mom very well, and in some ways, neither did I. But I started to experience that kind of longsuffering love. Not everybody grows up in a place with room to fail or room to grow through immaturity. But longsuffering love with room to fail is something we should all experience in Jesus’ church.

This should be our experience. It should be that sin is addressed humbly and gently, but also that longsuffering love always remains. Together cannot last without it. But through it, together will be accomplished not merely naturally but supernaturally, and not merely superficially but intimately, not merely partially but perfectly, not merely now but forever. And in the special moments when we enjoy the sweetness of that kind of longsuffering love from each other, we can trust that it’s just a mere taste of the glorious longsuffering love of the Savior we serve. And it’s when we remember that love that we’ve been shown by Him and extend it to each other, that God is seen for who He is; a gloriously merciful and giving God beyond our wildest imagination. If that sort of mindset permeates our culture, there is room to fail and grow without fear. We discover a place where together can safely succeed and last for good. Would you seek that? I believe God would have us do that.