

Session One



Accept One Another

It's hard to know the best way to respond to people who represent your "opposite you." Do you ignore them? Leave the room when they enter so you don't say something you later will regret? Share a meal and discuss your differences?

Dismiss your differences? How do you find and show acceptance toward someone when you would rather show them the door? The answer can be found in this admonition: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Romans 15:7).

MAX LUCADO

Opening Reflection

We are creatures of comfort and creatures of habit. We like the familiar and predictable. We like agreement over conflict. Peace over disruption. These are the things that make us feel happy, content, at rest. And all these things—comfort, familiarity, agreement—are achievable as long as we interact only with people who are just like us. People who are part of the same political party, church denomination, ethnic group, or country. People who like what we like and dislike what we dislike.

This is all fine and good, but there is one problem. To live in the world we live in today, we are bound to interact with someone who is different from us. A coworker, someone next to us on the bus, a neighbor, classmate, teacher, or pastor. We have been created equal, but we have not been created alike. For this reason, if our happiness depends on being surrounded by people who agree with us all the time, we won't feel happy very often.

In this week's study, we will be looking at Romans 15:7, where Paul wrote, "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." Note that Paul did not specify to the Roman church *whom* they should accept. He did not say *accept the people you like* or *accept the*

Accept One Another

people who look like you or accept the people who think the same way as you think. He left it general and open-ended. Accept whom? One another.

Could it be we are called to accept the Democrat and the Republican? The Midwesterner and Southerner? The immigrant and the native? The Catholic and the Protestant?

Further, Paul instructs us to accept one another as Christ accepted us. How did Christ accept us? He loved us so much that he made the greatest sacrifice for us. He died for us. Rose from the grave for us. Left the Holy Spirit to dwell within us. Christ welcomed us into the family of God. And this, the Bible says, is how we are to welcome others.

So open your mind and your heart as you explore today's topic. Discover how accepting one another can make happiness happen in your own life—and for those you accept as Christ accepted you.

Talk About It

If you or any of your group members are just getting to know one another, take a few minutes to introduce yourselves. Then, to kick things off, discuss one of the following questions:

- What is something that made you happy this week?

—or—

- What comes to mind when you think of “accepting one another”?

Hearing the Word

Invite someone to read aloud Romans 15:5–7. Listen for fresh insights as you hear the verses being read, and then discuss the questions that follow.

⁵ May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, ⁶ so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷ Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

What is one key insight that stands out to you from this passage?

In what ways did that represent a new insight?

According to this passage, why should we accept one another?

Video Teaching Notes

Play the video segment for session one. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts or concepts that stand out to you.

Happiness happens when you choose to give it away. Jesus' words were spot-on when he said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

One of the most difficult relationship questions is what to do with your "opposite you." You know the one—it's the person with whom you fundamentally disagree.

Accept one another. The verb Paul uses for *accept* means more than to merely tolerate or coexist with someone. It means to welcome the person into your fellowship.

While Jesus doesn't accept our sinful behavior, he always accepts us as his wayward children. He doesn't tell us to clean up before we can come to him.

How Happiness Happens Study Guide

You are never called to redeem the world. Happiness happens not by *fixing* people but by *accepting* them and entrusting them to God's care.

It is one thing to have an opinion. It's something else to have a fight. So when you sense the volume increasing and the heat rising, close your mouth.

Happiness happens when you show other people that they matter. The Bible says that as you greet others and show acceptance, you *demonstrate* the love of Christ.

Three phrases—"I love you," "I forgive you," "supper's ready"—summarize Jesus' message. He came with love, grace . . . and a dinner invitation.

Accept One Another

I got to the point where I realized that if there was going to be joy in my life, I had to be a joyful person. So I bought a bunch of candy, and I went around the office and gave it out. I walked past a conference room and I saw a coworker that I wasn't particularly fond of, and I thought, "Maybe he needs some joy." So I placed some candy on the table. He looked at me and he said, "Is this a joke?" We both got a chuckle—it was a nice moment for both of us to just let our guards down and be kind to each other. It's not like this was an earth-shattering experience that changed either of us. But I think it was impactful for the both of us to just have something that brought a little kindness, a little happiness, to both of our lives.

— ALLISON, FROM THE VIDEO

Group Discussion

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.

1. Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Have you ever experienced happiness by giving it away? If so, describe that experience.

How Happiness Happens Study Guide

2. Paul instructs, "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you" (Romans 15:7). What is the difference between *accepting* someone and *tolerating* someone?

3. Whom would you consider your "opposite you"? (This could be someone from your past or someone in your life today.) How do you typically interact with that person?

4. Read John 1:14. What does it mean to be full of both *grace* and *truth*? Who is someone in your life who is full of grace and truth? How does this person show these qualities?

5. Read Romans 14:1-3. Social media provides a hostile environment where people often argue, disagree with each other, and tear each other down. How can this passage be applied to the way we get into arguments and debates on social media and elsewhere?

Accept One Another

6. Read Romans 16:16. Why do you think Paul made it a point to instruct the church members in Rome to greet one another?
7. When was a time someone greeted you when you were having a bad day or going through a difficult season? How did that greeting make you feel?
8. What part of Allison's story resonated with you? After listening to her story, did anyone come to mind whom you need to accept? How could you work to accept this person?

Closing Activity

To apply today's study, complete the Scripture exercise below:

- *Fill in the blank with the name of someone who is difficult for you to accept: "Accept _____ then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Romans 15:7).*
- *Fill in the blank with the name of someone with whom you often disagree: "Be in agreement, understanding*

How Happiness Happens Study Guide

_____, loving each other as family, being kind and humble” (1 Peter 3:8 NCV).

- *Fill in the blanks with the name of someone you need to greet and how you could greet him or her (for example, a handshake, a “hello,” a note of encouragement):*
“Greet _____ with a holy _____”
(Romans 16:16).

If you feel comfortable, share with your group what this experience was like for you.

Closing Prayer

Close your time by spending time with your heavenly Father. Using the prompts below, have one person lead your group in a time of group prayer:

- Thank God for accepting you into his family by giving you his Son, Jesus.
- Confess that you have not always been accepting of others in the past.
- Ask God to give you empathy to help you better understand the people around you.
- Praise God for creating such a diverse world full of beauty and creativity.