

Romans #32 - Church Family: Supernatural Diversity

- Well, you look great. You guys are just so adorable, so good to see you guys. Hey, we're in Romans 15 incredible book of the Bible. We taken about a year going through it and we're in chapter 15, looking at relationships and how we get along. And it's been kind of interesting. I got done preaching last night, came home. Grace was like, "Yeah, you didn't talk about anything in your notes." I said, "Yeah, I know it's kind of weird." She said, "What are you gonna talk about tomorrow?" I was like, "I don't know." So kind of the way it's been working is Romans 1-11 the book breaks down into two big thought units. Romans 1-11 is kind of the head of Christianity. If you're kind of my nerd friend, you like footnotes and reading dead guys and Greek words and ah, you loved one through 11. It was very exciting for you. It's about the head of Christianity. What we believe 12 through 16, where we find ourselves it's really the heart of Christianity. So if you're a hugger, if you remember people's names, if you're kind, you really liked this section and the person that you're with that was kind of the nerd guy. They're like, "Oh, I wish we had more big ideas." They're like, "No, we have big relationships." And God wants us to have both big concepts about who He is and big, healthy, loving relationships with others. So Romans 12-16 is really the heart of Christianity. So the way the sermons have been working, I'm not really sure what I'm gonna talk about and that could be good or bad. Either way it's gonna be exciting. And it's more like a counseling session is kind of how I feel as I'm teaching this section of the book. In a counseling session, you don't really know exactly where the conversation's gonna go. You just trust the Holy Spirit to show up and direct it. And so that's where we find ourselves. So if you're a note taker, best of luck, praying for you. Now, nonetheless, as we get into Romans 12-16, but especially chapter 15, it's about how do we do life together? As Christians we are very diverse, lots of languages and nations and cultures and backgrounds and generations. And we all come together. This can be in a family. This can be in a church family. How do we practice unity within the midst of diversity, especially when there're things that we just disagree about regarding where to draw the line. So I'll start with a story. I became a Christian in college at the age of 19 and I got involved in a really great church, loving church, healthy church, Bible-based church, humble, godly, incredible pastor. I'm so grateful for where God had me start my faith journey with Jesus in the church. And then I'd gone all the way through school, previous to college as a non-Christian. I didn't really have any Christian friends except for my now wife Grace and a buddy of mine who I had played sports with growing up, he I heard became a Christian. And if you become a Christian and you hear that one of your year old buddies becomes a Christian you really wanna get ahold of them and hear their story and kind of share the good news together. So on Christmas break or Summer break from college, I think it was perhaps Christmas came back to my hometown and I looked at my buddy I was like, "Can we get together?" We did, I was like, "I became a Christian." He's like, "I became a Christian." I was like, "Okay, tell me your story." I was so excited to have an old friend now be a new brother. And so then I made it my aim every time I came back for a break from college to get together with him and just check in. And every time we met it got worse and it got weirder. And so like the first time we got together, he was like, "Are you reading your Bible?" I was like, "Yeah, I am, I'm

studying." I really actually like the Bible. I've kind of find it good and fun. He's like, "What translation are you reading?" I was like, "Oh, this feels like a trick question." I was like, well, what kind of translation do you read? Is I got read the King James Bible. It's the only one that's right. All of the versions are corrupted and they're pagan and they're demonic and they're evil and they're from the antichrist and you're gonna end up with the mark of the beast and put it in a wood chipper and then sent to hell. I was like, oh, well, okay, well that's a lot, you know. And I said, "Well, I don't necessarily think "the King James Bible is the best." I think it's fine. That's fine for now, but not for thee and so. I read another chart. So he gives me this big book. He said, "Read this, it'll tell you why the King James Bible "is the only Bible." I was like, "No, no, I have a friend, "but every time I see him, he gives me homework." This is an odd relationship. So I went back to college and I come back and I had another break and I got together with him and he's like, "Have you been baptized yet?" I said, "Yeah, I got baptized." He said, "Was it in the name of Jesus, of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit?" This true story. I said, "Well, it was the name of the Father, Son "and Holy Spirit." He said, "You did it wrong." I was like, I got wet. That seemed right to me. You know, I didn't think there was a lot of other fine print. And I said, "No, Jesus said, to be baptized "in the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit." He said, "Yeah, but sometimes an "only baptized the name of Jesus. "Here, read this book." Gives me another book. Gives me another book and I said, "Well, I got baptized in the name "of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit. "I covered all the bases. "I got Jesus in there. "I'm good." You know, I got everybody and he's like, "No, you did it wrong, I'm not sure it counts." And I was like, "Well, thank you for your encouragement." So I go back to college, I come back and we meet again. And he asks, he says, "Well, what's worship like at your church? I'm like, oh, no, oh no. I said, "Well, what's worship like at your church?" He said, "We do it God's way. "We only sing the psalms and the hymns. "We don't do the contemporary music "'cause the temporary music has drums and wheel "and you know drums are demonic." I was like, "Oh, I didn't know that." And sure none of the drummers knew that . So he's like, "Well, some of the songs that are current, "they're written by people who have bad doctrine. "You don't wanna be affiliated with bad doctrine, "bringing in false teaching." And then I was like, "I don't know, they sang about Jesus. "I liked it, I like Jesus." I don't know, I could find who wrote the song, go to their house, knock on the door and interrogate them, but I'd rather not. So he gives me another book. He's like, "Here's why all your songs are wrong." I was like, "Okay, great." So then I go to college, I come back, I kid you not. This was our last conversation. He's like, "Are you doing evangelism?" I was like, "Yeah, talk to people "about Jesus all the time, I'm a big mouth. "I can't help myself. "I don't have an inner voice. "You know, everything's out here." And he said, "Are you doing street evangelism, "street witnessing?" I was like, "What do you mean?" He's like, "Walking up to people on the street." I was like, "No, I don't walk up to strangers. "That to me seems like a hostage negotiation. "I'm not really big on street evangelism. "I'm glad that works for you. "That's not my thing." He said, "You need to go out on the street." He said, "'Cause we're in the last days "and Jesus is coming back any minute "and people are going to hell "and this is our last opportunity." I was like, "You know when Jesus is coming back?" He's like "I do." Here's a book. Gives me another book with a bunch of charts in it. If you're one of those people, like I got one of those too, burn that book. You're crazy. Okay, they... Nobody knows when Jesus is coming back. And I said, "Well, I don't know when He's coming back." I said... He said, "I do." So I told him, I said, "Now, every time we

get together, "I feel like I'm being interrogated "and you're trying to find the ways "that I'm a bad Christian." He said, "Why? "I'm just trying to help you 'cause I love you." I was like, well, this doesn't feel very helpful. And he said, "These things need to change in your life." I said, "Or what?" He said, "Or we can't fellowship because you're worldly." I was like, well, I thought, well you're judgy. So it seems like we're equally yoked. This should work out fine. And he literally told me, he said, "Unless these things change in your life, "I can't fellowship with you. "I can't be friends with you. "I can't talk to you anymore "because I believe you're living a compromised life." And I looked at him I said, "Buddy, I love Jesus, "you love Jesus. "If Jesus accepted you and Jesus accepted me, "we should accept each other." If Jesus is okay with how you're walking your walk and He's okay with how I'm walking my walk, we should be able to walk together. He looked at me, he literally said, he said, "But you're doing it wrong." And I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "I'm doing it right?" I said, "You know what? "I think there's a lot of lanes that go North, "you're in your lane, I'm in my lane. "We're both going North. "I don't think that your lane is the only lane "and if you're in another lane, you're not going North." And he cut off all contact with me. He didn't talk to me anymore. How many of you right now there's somebody in your life that they've drawn lines in a different place than you? And what he'd done, he'd drawn his line in a different place I drew my line and what I told him was, read the Bible that's my line. His line was, read the King James Bible. My line was, worship the Lord. His line was, worship the Lord with these songs and these instruments. My line was, be baptized publicly out of love for Jesus and his was, be baptized this specific way. Mine was tell people about Jesus. That's my line 'cause Jesus loves people and I love people and his line was, here's how and when and where and why you tell them about Jesus. We drew the lines in different places. This happens all the time in life, but it becomes particularly painful in our Christian relationships. How many of you right now, there's somebody that maybe even says they're Christian and where they draw the line is different than where you draw the line and it causes a lot of tension and friction in the relationship. How many of you, you grew up in a Christian home and where your parents drew some lines is different than where you've drawn some lines. How many of you you're trying to raise your kids and then some family or friends are telling you where to draw the line and how to raise your kid and how to it God's way. And that means simply doing it their way. This is one of the hard forms of the Christian life is, okay, when you and I draw the lines in different places, how do we still love one another? How do we do life together? At what point are those lines so important that we really do need to have a conversation maybe even a conflict over the line and where are the other lines that we simply say, you know what? I'm just gonna let that go. I love you. The issue is not as important as the relationship. That's the context of Romans 12-16, but especially 15. So let me start with one big idea that sort of summarizes the book ends of this section of the Bible and then we'll get directly into the text. And I wanna talk about something that I like to call national versus state borders. I'll start with a story and then we'll jump into the text here. So when our kids were little, we got five kids. When our kids were little, I would travel a lot to speak around the country and around the world. And I hate being away from Grace and the kids. I would go into a low-level depression if I had to travel alone, as I was anticipating being away from them. I love my family. I like having Grace and the kids around. So what I started doing is asking, hey, if I come speak, can I bring the family in lieu of, you know, whatever I was gonna give her an honorarium or whatever. I'll

just forego that. Can I bring Grace and the kids 'cause I want them to travel the world. And so the kids got to go all over the globe and it was incredible. And they got pretty accustomed to international travel. And it's a thing, especially traveling with five kids. Like it would be funny. Like we got on a flight to Scotland and the five kids come on and everybody's looking at me like put them in the overhead bin, put them in the overhead bin, put them in the overhead. I mean, they could sense that doom was coming with five small children on an airplane. But my kids were really well behaved 'cause they traveled a lot and they knew the drill. Okay, we gotta wait in line. Then we gotta, you know, show our passport and then they're gonna ask us questions and then we gotta go through security and then somebody is gonna stamp our passport and then we gotta go into the country. They knew that it was a long, laborious, painful process. And then there was another occasion when we were taking a trip with the kids, but it wasn't international. It was national. We weren't crossing an international boundary or border, just a state border. So we're going from one state to another we're driving in the car. And I remember driving in the car the kids are all in the back car seats and juice boxes and action figures and fishy crackers. You know, the drill if you're a parent. And so we drive by, I said, "Hey kids, look, "we're going into the next state." And there was just a sign there, you know, welcome to this next state and we drive right by. And one of the kids in the back seat asks, "Well, don't we need to do something?" There we're used to traveling international. They don't need to pull over and wait in the line and show our form and you know, get a stamp or, you know, if we don't answer the question right, go into the other room and be interrogated. And Dayserd's like, "Isn't there a process "that comes with a travel?" And what I said was, "No, when you go from one state to another "there's nothing to do. "You just drive right in." Okay. Christianity is like this. We have national borders that if you leave them you're in another religion. We have state borders where different Christians do things differently, but we're all part of the same nation. Here's how he explains it. Romans 16, 17. He talks about what I will call the national boundaries. "I appeal to you brothers, Christians "to watch out for those who cause divisions." There're certain people that are working for unity, others that are working for division. Certain people that are trying to bring people together, others to tear them apart. Are you with us or with them and create obstacles meaning hurdles and handicaps and hardships for people contrary to the what's the word? The doctrine that you have been taught, avoid them. Doctrine is what God says is true, okay? So for Christianity, there are borders and boundaries. There's one God and three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit. You believe in a God other than the Trinity, you have entered into another religion. You've crossed a border, a boundary. If you don't believe in the Bible, you've crossed another border or boundary. If you don't believe that Jesus is God, lived without sin, died for our sin, rose as our savior, is coming again to judge the living and the dead. If Jesus isn't the focal point you've crossed a national border and now you're into another religion. There are two ways to find yourself in that position. Number one, you're just a non-Christian, you're in another religion, ideology or spirituality or number two, you start as a professing Christian and then you abandoned some Christian beliefs and you cross over that boundary or border. We call that apostasy. Right now there's a wholesale generational apostasy that is going on especially among a lot of younger folks and those who have a social justice awareness and conscience in what I would call woke ism, which is a counterfeit to being born again. And so a whole bunch of people would say they're Christians, but then they cross over certain boundaries

and they leave Christian beliefs. So we need to know where those are because these are issues that are important and significant. And I may love you, but I can't agree with you. I can't worship with you because now you've entered into another religious commitment. Within Christianity there are not doctrines there's also opinions. These are like the state borders. Different people wanna live here. Some wanna live there. Some wanna do it this way. Some wanna do it that way. Look at our country and just think of it in terms of the Christian church. Here's the Lutherans. Here's the Presbyterians. Here's the Baptist. Whoop, whoop, here's the Pentecostals. Here are the people who like this kind of music, the people who like that kind of music, all different states, figure out where you wanna move, where you wanna live and as long as it's within those state boundaries, under the national boundaries, you're a faithful Christian. He says it this way in Romans 14:1, "As for the one who has weakened faith, welcome him, "but do not quarrel over what?" Opinions, opinions. There's a difference between God's doctrines and your opinions. Some people make everything opinions. God doesn't have opinions. God has doctrines. And other people, they say, "Well, my opinion doesn't need to be God's doctrines." God's like no, I've got my own doctrines. Those are your opinions. When we're in relationship with people, the question is, is this a doctrine or an opinion? Is this an issue that's so big that it could jeopardize the relationship or is it a minor item that we need to just sort of overlook because the relationship is more important than the issues. This makes sense. It's very quiet. I don't mean to wake you up, but just I'm just asking, is this making sense? Think of someone right now that you're having conflict or disagreement or some level of tension with and is it over a national or a state border? Is it something that really is a big deal or is the relationship a bigger deal? So we'll jump right into Romans 15:1. And he's talking here about how we can have healthy relationships with each other based upon the healthy relationship we have with God. "We who are strong, "have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak "and not to please ourselves." Now, what he's talking about here are two categories of people. So you've gotta figure which one you're in the strong and the weak. And it's in reference to this. "Sin is crossing a line that God makes." Back to the national borders and boundaries. Sin is a line that God draws. God says, if you cross this line, you're now in sin. So let's say you are single and you move into with their boyfriend or girlfriend. You've crossed the line. You're married, you cheat on your husband or wife, you've crossed the line. You have a drink, you have too many drinks. You get drunk, you've crossed the line. And then repentance is, you acknowledge that you've crossed the line and you go back to God's side of the line. That's what repentance is. "We all sin, fall short of the glory of God." He told us in Romans. At various points, we all crossed the line. Jesus died because we crossed the line and then he allows us to come back to the other side of the line. So this line is drawn by God and God never moves that line because God got it right the first time. Now what happens is in regards to these lines, these national boundaries of behavior and belief, there are strong people who can go right up to the line, they can go right up to the line. No problem at all and they don't cross it. I can have a drink, but I don't get drunk. I can be friends with people of the opposite sex, but I don't flirt and get into emotional adultery. I can handle a great deal of money, but I'm not tempted to steal any of it for myself. I have these freedoms and I enjoy my full freedom right up to the line and I don't cross it. There are other... Those are the strong people. The weak people. They're like, I can't get near that line. I can't get... If I get close to the line, I just run right over it. They're like, if I have one

drink, I get drunk. Like that's it. It's all or nothing for me. My life doesn't have a dimmer switch in this area. It's all or nothing it's on or off. If I have a lot of money, I'm a bad steward. I'm gonna end up at the casino and I'm gonna make a lot of bad decisions, and I actually need a lot of self-discipline when it comes to my finances because boy if you just give me money, you're gonna give me problems. Different people have different areas that we're all strong and weak. Okay. And what he's saying is those who are strong can live close to the line, those who are weak they need to get a lot of distance between them and the line. Question was Jesus Christ, weak or strong? Strong. He could come right up to the line. He drank alcohol, but he never got drunk. He could be friends with women, Mary and Martha were two of his dearest friends, but He never had any inappropriate relationship with women. He could eat food without being a glutton. He could go to parties without doing anything that was sinful or wrong. So Jesus lived right on the line. Now who criticized Him the most? Pharisees the religious people because they were? Weak. The weakest people are the most religious people. The weakest people are the most judgmental people. The weakest people are the most controlling people and what they did they drew lines for themselves here's their opinions there's God's line. Jesus is living, not over God's line, but over whose line, their line. So they keep critiquing him while he's drinking he must be a drunkard, it's not a drunkard. He's a glutton he's eating food. He must be glutton he wasn't a glutton. He's a friend of sinners. That's true. That's how I got saved and we're all glad that Jesus is a friend of sinners otherwise we wouldn't be friends with people like us. And so what happens is they're criticizing Jesus not for crossing God's line, but for crossing their line. It's okay for you to have a line that's your opinion, but God has a doctrine. You don't sin unless you cross the line that God draws not the line that you draw. Religious people don't understand this. That's why the religious people crucified Jesus because He crossed their line but He never did sin He never crossed God's line. When he's talking about the weak and the strong, the question then is should the weak people accommodate the strong people or should the strong people accommodate the weak people? What's the answer? The strong people should accommodate the weak people. Let me say this, there are four kinds of weak people. Number one, we're all weak in some area. You and I need to be honest about ourselves and say, you know what? In some areas I'm really strong and I can enjoy my freedom other areas I'm really weak like, that is a difficulty for me. That's a temptation. That's a trouble. That's a trial. I was talking to a guy he's a very strong leader. Very competent, very capable, loves the Lord, knows the Bible, but he was a very immoral man as a young man, then he got saved and he got married and he took a job or he'd go to work and he'd come home and he's with his wife and his kids all the time, the company came to him and they said, "We'd like to promote you into a very significant, "very affluent position, massive pay raise and upgrade. "But the requirements are, "you're gonna need to be on the road a lot. "You're gonna need to be traveling internationally "in a way from home a lot." And he met with me and he's like, Pastor Mark is like, I lived a very immoral life and there's a lot of things I've done that I regret and he's like, honestly, I just don't totally trust myself. He said, I think I'm free to take the job. He said, but I think if I'm away from my wife and kids a lot that puts me in harm's way. He said, I just think I just need to keep my job, stay home with my wife and kids and not be in hotels by myself all over the world. Answer? You need to draw that line. Now will you can't do is look at every other man on an airplane and say, repent and jump. You can't say that. But for him, that's a line that he needs to draw, that he

needs to draw. Number two, the way that people become weak in an area is sometimes poor teaching. Some of you were raised in legalistic, religious high control fear-based homes, where your parents would say, "You know, God says, "the Bible says" and then you got older and you learned how to read and you're like, "You're liar, it's not in there." How many of you here ? Now don't raise your hand, especially if you're here with your mom, but your mom told you something and then you realize that's not what the Bible says. Your mom made that up. And what she did she tagged God in for authority or your dad did the same. Sometimes people just get really bad teaching. They're just poorly taught. Number three, sometimes the way that people become weak is that they have religious trauma. How do I explain this in a loving way? When I first became a Christian, I was so frustrated with what I'll call legalistic and religious people. And that's the context here in this section of Romans. There's so many rules and so many judgments, it seemed like they just... They loved rules, but not relationships. They would win arguments and they lose people. And for them, it seemed like Christianity was like a math equation. You know, and I didn't understand religious people, legalistic people, people that would like my friend who I really love and it's tragic he ultimately killed himself. He tried to be perfect and he couldn't do it and he lost hope. Now, that's kind of where religion and legalism leads. It only leads to one of two places. It leads to pride. I'm better than you I did it or despair I didn't do it. And I'm worthless. And that's where he tragically ended up. He created standards for himself that he could not meet and so he ended up taking his own life. And what I find with some people is they've been hurt. They have had pain or trauma or brokenness by someone or something has really wounded them. The result is if they've not forgiven in that area and they've not healed in that area and sometimes this is where you need a counselor. You need, literally deliverance by the Holy Spirit that you need some healing, unless that happens, there's a broken or a traumatized part of you and you're terrified that that's gonna happen again. So now there's a lot of fear and there's a lot of anxiety because there was a lot of pain. And so what happens with people that are hurt but unhealed, they make a lot of what I will call inner vows. This is the opposite of a covenant with God. No one will do that again. No one will betray me again. No one will cheat on me again. No one will steal from me again. Nobody will ever talk to me like that. Nobody's gonna be my boss. You make these inner vows. And then what we do, we create rules and legalisms thinking that they will protect us from the harm that we experienced. And so here's what I'm telling you. The most religious people are the most broken. The most legalistic people are the most broken. The most controlling people are the most broken. The most judgmental people are the most broken. It doesn't mean that what they're doing is okay, but we can have some sympathy, some empathy, some compassion for them, because until they're healed up in that area, they're just working out of brokenness. If you're a parent, this really shows up when you have children. If you are a person that has any unhealed hurt or any unforgiven offense and there's a brokenness in you and your children enter this world. I got five kids I love them with all my heart. The last thing you want is your children to experience your pain. True or false? Totally true. And that is honestly a good thing, but it can lead to a lot of rulemaking, not relationship making. It can lead to a lot of parental control, not the spirit of self-control. It can lead to a lot of legalism and fear and control and manipulation and punishment and all that means is that you are weak. You're weak. And maybe God needs to heal you and maybe you need to forgive them so that you can be strong. And the only way that

a weak person becomes strong is if those who are strong bear with those who are weak. Now, you can't do this with everybody, but in your personal relationships, starting with your nearest neighbor, which would be your spouse or kids, let's say that there is an area of their life, where they are weak so they have to live way behind the line and maybe it's even because of brokenness and trauma you are strong, you can live close to the line. What there is now, there's distance between them and you. So the question is, do the weak need to bear with the strong or do the strong need to bear with the weak? What's the answer? The strong or with the weak? And it's coming alongside and it is saying, I don't agree with you on everything. I don't. I don't think that where you draw the lines is where God draws the lines. I think there's some brokenness in you that needs to be healed or some hurts that need to be forgiven, but I'm coming here to be with you 'cause I love you. And these issues matter, but this relationship matters more. And rather than enjoying my full freedom, I would like to enjoy our full friendship. And maybe I fought together and I'm with you and I'm for you and I love you and we talk and pray about these things, maybe over time, why, you just get a little stronger, not that you have to enjoy your full freedom in Christ, but let's see if we can get the most mature version of you. The healthiest version of you. Let me tell you what I just explained to you it's called parenting, right? If you've got a kid it's literally starting where they are building trust and walking with them in hopes that they grow in maturity and freedom. And what Paul is saying here is that this is the only way to do life as God's people. So let me give you an analogy just as a dad. And this is gonna be all kind of just a heartfelt verbal process with... In every family there's parents and there's children. Who accommodates who? Do the children accommodate the needs of the parents or do the parents accommodate the needs of the children? If you don't know, you're single, okay? If you're married, you know how this works. I've never seen a two year old wake up and he's like, I was praying today, mom, I'm wondering how I could lift burdens, maybe contribute financially, make your life better. I've never seen that. And if you've got that kid in name of Jesus, they're gonna do great things for the world, okay? So what happens in every family is the parents have a different mindset than the children because the parents are strong and mature and the children are weak and immature. God is a Father, we are his kids, your sons and daughters. He loves you with all of His heart. God can't love you anymore and here's the good news. It doesn't matter what you do. He won't love you any less. His love is not conditional. It's Christian which is just based on Christ and not your performance. And what the father knows is what every good parent knows and that is that in any healthy family system, there are certain things that all the kids need to know and these are the principles that govern the family. So, you know, hey, I gotta go to bed. When you go to the bathroom, don't do it in your bed. You know, some rules. Eat your dinner don't sass your mom. And yeah, we don't drink Red Bull at two o'clock in the morning. I mean, just basic rules for the kids. Then there are other rules that a healthy parent or there'll be principles that a healthy parent then will custom tailor make for each job. How many of you have got more than one kid? How many of you realize that you can't parent each kid identically the same. I see this with young parents all the time. They have their first kid and they're like, "Oh my gosh, this is impossible, "we have not slept in six years. "They won't stop screaming "and fluids keep coming out all their holes "I think we give birth to a sprinkler." You know, they're just overwhelmed. And then they kind of figure it out and they're like, hey, it's going pretty good. We got this. So then they get a little cocky and they have

another kid and they're like, we can do this again. And then they get the other kid and they do the same thing they did with the first kid. And they realize this kid's totally different. And so as you parent the kids, you're like, "Well, this kid's got this personality, "this kid's got this maturity, this kid's got this strength, "this kid's got this weakness." How do I custom tailor the parenting for each kid? God's a father you're His sons and daughters. He has some what I'll call national borders, some principles for all of his kids and then some state borders, some custom tailored parenting because he knows each of the kids best and what's best for them. And in any healthy family system, not only are their parents and children, there's also big brothers and sisters and little brothers and sisters. How many of you were the big brother or the big sister? How many of you had additional responsibility to look after the youngers? All right, how many of you, you were a child, but some days you're almost like kind of a assistant parent. I was the oldest of five. I was supposed to be, I'll just apologize to my mom on the internet. I was of no help whatsoever, but I was supposed to be as the big brother, I was supposed to be helpful. In the family those of you who are more mature, you're stronger, you can live more in your full freedom. Guess who you are? You're the big brothers and the big sisters. Those who are weaker, more immature they're the little brothers, the little sisters. And by you loving them and walking with them and encouraging them and even disagreeing with them, but not dividing from them, you're going to help strengthen them and mature them. All of this is what he means by saying that, those who are strong should bear with those who are weak. And then he goes forward and that was my first verse. We're 33 minutes in one verse, we're gonna do, how many verses we got today? We've got 13 verses. So we're gonna... If Jesus comes back before we finish, that'd be great. Okay, Romans 15:3-5. How do we have a relationship with a person is all established and predicated on how God has a relationship with us. See, once this relationship is established, now we know how to establish these relationships. This is why only the Christian really understands how to have a healthy relationship 'cause the first healthy relationship we have is our relationship with God through Christ. So he says this, "Let us each please his neighbor "for his good to build them up." What you say, why would we do that? That's crazy. I do what's best for them not for me. Well, because of Jesus for Christ did not please himself, but it is read in the approaches of those who were poached you fell on me for whatever was written in former days, it's talking about the Bible Old Testament was written for our instruction that through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope. Let me say this friend. I have such good news for you. There's a God who's a father, His heart toward you is a father's heart. He loves you. Because of sin you're a runaway rebellious, foolish orphan. Well, you do have a father and he loves you and he cares for you and he wants to have a relationship with you. And he wants to help you. He's there for you. Now to find you as the runaway orphan what the father did He sent our big brother the son of God, Jesus Christ. And He sent Him to the earth to seek and to save those of us who are lost, we're the foolish, rebellious, runaway orphans. And Jesus... It says that the reproach that was intended for us fell on Him. What that means is, Jesus took our place and put us in his place. I have been saying this publicly as a senior pastor for 25 years and I can tell you this every time I say it, it astonishes me. It's amazing. God took your place and He put you in his place. This is what happened at the cross of Jesus Christ. So there is the line. We've all stepped over the line and sinned against God. Our God comes, Jesus Christ. He never once crossed the line. He lived a life without any sin.

Word, thought, deed or motive, commission or omission, no transgression of any sort or kind Jesus is perfect. Now we're on that side of the line. He's on this side of the line and what's amazing is Jesus takes our place and puts us in His place. He dies so we can live. He endures the wrath of God so we could receive the grace of God. He is separated from the father, my God, my God why have you forsaken me? So we could be reconciled to the father. He takes all of the punishment so that we can get all of the peace. Jesus took your place and put you in His place. What this means is that when Jesus came to the earth, He came to do what was best for you not for Him. This is why we love Jesus so much. That when it says that He... Just read this language to you again, Christ did not please himself. Just think of how staggering that is. Every other person on planet earth wakes up, looks in the mirror and says, what do I want today? Jesus got up every day and He looked up and He asked, what do you want today? And what Jesus did was He "Lost" so that you and I could win. The only way we have a relationship with Jesus is because He made it possible. So let me ask you this, in our relationship with Jesus, who's the weak one? If you don't know, you've not been paying attention, okay? We are. Who's the strong one? Jesus. And you know what He did, He came down to bear with the failings of those of us who are weak, to have a relationship with us, to help make us stronger. Just think about it for a moment. All that Jesus gave so that he could have a relationship with you. He went from heaven to earth. He went from being worshiped to being falsely accused. He went from being free to being arrested. He went from being served by angels to working as a carpenter. He went from riches to poverty. He went from full divinity to also taking upon himself willingly humanity. Jesus did everything in His life for you to win and it was at His loss. I'll just tell you that. So people say, "Well, the Bible's made up." Nobody makes this up. Nobody on planet earth would have conceived of a God who was humble and selfless and generous and sacrificial and faithful to people like me or you. How many of you really love the way that Jesus treats us? Do you like that? Are you for that? Does that sound good? So what He says is, you can clap if you want, if you like the way Jesus treats you feel free to get excited about that. And then he says, "So then treat other people "the way Jesus treated you." Have a relationship with them the way He had a relationship with you. Pursue them the way He's pursued you. Accommodate them the way He's accommodated you. Put up with them the way He's put up with you. And most Christians at this point are like, I love my relationship with Jesus. Yeah, I'm not doing that. But this is the fullness of the Christian life. The relationship with Jesus is to inform and direct all of our other relationships. And what this requires is service. If we could summarize everything that Paul is saying here, it's a servant. And I always like to say that we all live on a continuum from servant to selfish. I'll do it this way. Servant to selfish. The more selfish you are, the more hellish you are. More of a servant you are the more heavenly you are. And that when you have two selfish people, you have a brutal relationship. It is a war. It is a fight. I'm gonna win. No I'm gonna win. I'm gonna get the last word. You will not get the last word. My attorney is gonna beat your attorney. That's where it ends up, especially in marriage. When you have a selfish person and a servant, you get an abusive relationship. The selfish person takes advantage of the servant. I win you lose. I take you give. The way you get a beautiful relationship is two servants. I take care of you, you take care of me. You seek what I want, I seek what you want. I want to build you up, you want to build me up. This is a Christian relationship. And I'll just be honest with you. I sometimes preach better sermons than I live. I was sitting because it's hot out. I put my

chair in the pool. Okay. Don't judge me that's a state border not a national. So I'm sitting in the pool in my chair and I'm reading this section of the Bible and my first thought, I'll just be totally honest with you this is gonna be a good sermon for Grace. There's some real insights in here for her. This could be a breakthrough with the Grace glass. And then the Holy Spirit showed up and he's always a little late. So he shows up and God totally convicted me because Grace and I were having not a war, but just not quite rolling in the same boat. You know, not in sync in life. And it's just recent. I love her with all my heart. It's not catastrophic, but it was just one of... If you've been married we call this Tuesday. It happens, okay. So and the Holy Spirit really convicted me. And he was like, Mark, you're being selfish. That's the problem. You're wanting Grace to serve you that's selfish. You need to serve her and let me talk to her right now I'm talking to you. So you don't need to talk to her. I'll talk to her. I'm talking to you. Okay. Now I'm happy to report lightning did not strike 'cause I was in the pool. And so God was very gracious to me. I had to walk in, I didn't have to I got to walk into the house and I looked at Grace and I said, "Honey, we have a problem." She's like, "Yeah, I know." I was like, "Okay, let me say it this way, "Honey, I'm the problem." I'm the problem. God just spoke to me through His word. It says, please his neighbor. There's some things I've been doing in saying that that grieve you, they don't please you, to build you up. Yeah if there's some areas that I think you need to grow and some areas that you think I need to grow, rather than criticizing one another, we should be building one another. Rather than saying, hey, you're not here. We should say, I'm here with you. And I had to repent to my wife and her name's Grace. So she forgave me. I mean, she don't really have a choice. God kind of backed her into a corner on that. Grace can't be like, no grace for you. Like she can't. I mean, 'cause this works well for me. She forgave me. We prayed and we reconciled and honestly last night was the best night's sleep I've had in weeks. And I just... Because this burden of this conflict was lifted. And you can be a Christian and have relationships that aren't very Christian or you can be a Christian and have relationships that are Christian. And the difference is are you treating them the way that Jesus Christ treats us? And what he's saying is he talks about our relationship with God, our relationship with others and then he says, the only way you're gonna learn this, the only place they're gonna learn this is from the scriptures. And I love what he says here about the Bible. He says, "For whatever was written in former days "was written for our instruction "that through endurance "and through encouragement of scripture we might have hope." What he's saying is this. You're not going to learn how to be a healthy person apart from the word of God. You're not gonna learn how to have healthy relationships apart from the word of God and you can't have any relationship with God apart from the word of God. The Old Testament here that it's referring to in particular, the New Testament was in the process of being written it was to give us, what are the words? Encouragement so that we could have hope. They will tell you that you need food, water, air, and shelter to live I would add hope. There are people that have food, water, air, and shelter that end their life because without hope it's hard to live. And what I would submit to you is this, we live in a world that is not marked by encouragement and hope. It's just not. And every once in a while, people will try to give us hope and actually to me it's rather hopeless. Sometimes it is, well, you just need to hope in people. People are basically good. And it's like, have you met any people? I mean, do you know any, like the world is not good in getting better. Can we just at this point just say, evolution doesn't seem to be going that direction. We're not

good in getting better. And the answer is, well, where do we get encouragement and where do we get hope? We only get that from the scriptures because what we learned in the scriptures is there is a God who is over everything. And so as we look at the future, we can have a lot of fear. If we look up to God, we have hope that the same God who was faithful to his people prior to us will not cease to be faithful once we have arrived. Here's what I'm telling you. If you are struggling to have encouragement and hope, you need more time in God's word and you need more of God's word in you. And I was just thinking about it. I'll be totally honest with you. I got a wife I love with all my heart. I got five kids and I have the tremendous honor of being your pastor and teaching you the Bible. And I love you with all my heart and with people, I feel a sense of concern and responsibility like is everybody gonna be okay? Are they gonna be all right? Or you know, is everything gonna work out? And you look into the future and you can have a lot of fear with your spouse, with your kids, with your friends, with your extended family, with your church family. And sometimes what we do we get so fixated on what is coming that we lose encouragement and then the spirit of fear comes in, which is demonic. And we lose hope. And all of a sudden it starts to rob us of any sense of peace or joy. And rather than looking forward to what might happen, what he's saying is, look backward open this book and see what God has already done. Now, I don't know about you. I read the Bible and what I don't see is a bunch of great people who nailed it. I don't. I see a faithful God who shows up in powerful ways. That's what I see. I mean, I'm just thinking aloud, but like Genesis 3, Satan shows up Adam and Eve decide to create an alliance with Satan against God and bring death to planet earth and God shows up and says, "Okay, I'll send Jesus, "I'll fix it." We ruined everything and God immediately promised that Jesus could fix everything. That's amazing to me. And then the story goes on. The world is so bad that God floods it. And He gives one guy and his family a boat. It's like, okay, okay that's good. There's days that my family needs a boat. They get off the boat and you're like, "Okay, God's gonna start over with Noah "and he's drunk and naked in his tent." You're like, well, that's the 4th of July in Kentucky. That's different. Wasn't expecting that. For those that are on the live stream from Kentucky there's hope for you too, that's what I'm saying. And then God picks a guy named Abraham and says, you know what? He's pagan and godless but through him I'm gonna bring forth a nation that will bring forth Jesus Christ to be the savior of the nations. And Abraham gives away his wife twice. Which is too many. And he also gets a girlfriend and gets her pregnant. God still figures it out. And then God says, "Okay, I'm gonna work through "some other people like a king named David "who commits adultery and murders the husband." And the guy still gets to write books of the Bible and lead worship. Point is you're doing great. I mean, if you read this, this is not about all the good people who got it right. This is about the faithful God who made it right for the people who got it wrong. That's the story. So what I'm telling you is this, if you look at your future you're not gonna have encouragement and hope unless you first look back to God's faithfulness, oh, He's provided for generations and families. He can part the Red Sea. He could send bread in the middle of the wilderness. He can raise dead people. He's got this. And the hope and the encouragement from the scriptures is, you're not an orphan. You're a child of the living God. Your father is not going to abandon you. He's not abandoned any of his children prior to you. He's not gonna change His character starting with you. That the God who got you to here, through it will get you through it to there. And this is the hope of the believer. And some people will say, well, this is naive and say, you

know what? Actually, I can go all the way back to our first parents and I have a God with a proven track record of faithfulness and graciousness. And I am trusting His character because He has proven himself to be trustworthy. So let me just say this friends, I really would just beg you to spend more time in God's word so that you could have encouragement and hope. And what tends to happen is if you don't spend time in God's word to find encouragement and hope you find diversions and distractions. This is where we just Netflix, Binge or we just spend a lot of time on the internet or social media. If you wanna have encouragement and hope don't spend all your time online. And it's people trying to forget or ignore life. Well, rather than that, we wanna invite God into life. And there's something called the rule of four. I've shared it before. I'll share it again. There was a large statistical data study done of Bible reading. And there was one thing that they didn't expect that came out and it's called the rule of four. And it is, if you have God's word in one day of your life, you read it. And let me say this, getting God's word in your life is a principle you pick the method. You can read it out of the Bible. You can have a Bible reading plan from the You Version app. You can have the Bible read to you while you're driving in your car. You can listen to Bible teaching podcasts. You can do a curriculum or a study. You can memorize verses. You can read whole chapters. I don't care. I don't care. The principle is, get into God's word, get God's word into you. The method is whatever works for you, whatever state you wanna drive to just feel free to live there. But if God's word is in one day of your life, it has a negligible impact on your emotional health and your behavior. Two days, negligible effect or impact on your emotional health, your behavior. Three days, negligible effect on your health or emotional behavior. Four days, absolutely spikes off the charts. Your whole life statistically changes from your behavior to your sin patterns, to your mindset, to your emotional disposition if God's word becomes the majority of days of your week. It's almost like there is a transition of the scales from God's word being the minority of your week to being the majority of your week. Now, all of a sudden momentum completely changes at the soul level. And what I would submit to you is if you can spend time in God's word and God's word in you every day, you just got a promise here from God encouragement and hope. I love you so much I want that for you. I want encouragement and hope. And I can't give it to you, but the Holy Spirit can give it to you if you spend time in God's word. And then he closes with this final section, what does a life lived look like in the Christian definition of winning? For most people winning in life means I make more money. Jesus didn't make a lot of money. For some people it is I need to set the record straight. Well, Jesus left it crooked. People said horrible things about Him and He lived with it. For some people is I need to get back in my enemies. Jesus forgave him. For the Christian the redefining of winning is living in the spirit as the most healthy version of you. Okay. I'll bring the band up at this point. We'll look at this final section. Let's just read it together. "May the God of endurance and encouragement "grant you to live in harmony with one another "in accordance with Christ, Jesus "that together with one voice, "you may glorify the God and Father "of our Lord Jesus Christ." We're gonna obey that just a moment. You know what we're gonna do. We're gonna sing together. This is the Bible saying that when you sing together your voices become one and as you live together your lives become one. That unity really starts in worship. Therefore, welcome one another as Christ as welcomed you. What we're saying is, we treat one another the way Jesus treated us for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ became a servant. That's the big idea. We're just talking about to the circumcise those are Jewish people to show God's

truthfulness in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs in an order that the Gentiles may glorify God for His mercy. He's talking here about religious people who are legalistic and self-righteous and judgmental and unbelievers who live over the line and just sin. And what he says is religious people and rebellious people both need Jesus. Jesus came for the rebellious who were over the line and the religious who make their own lines. He goes on to say, as it is written, and then he's gonna quote Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Psalms. "Therefore I will praise you the Gentiles, "the non-Christians and sing to your name." And again, it says, "Rejoice oh, Gentiles with his people." And again, "Praise the Lord all you Gentiles "and let all the peoples extol him." And again, Isaiah says, he just told us, if you go to the Old Testament, you're gonna get encouragement and hope. And he says, here's some examples. Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse will come "even he who arises to rule the Gentiles "in him will the Gentiles hope. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy "and peace and believing "so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, "you may abound in hope." Maybe give me a little keys and I'll tell 'em a little story and then we'll close. So some years ago, Grace and I were married. We had little kids. We had one car, we were poor. We're in ministry. I prayed God, give us a second car. God answered that prayer, a guy came up to me he said, "I've got a car for you." I was like, "Great." He gave me the keys. Now it was a four door old German sedan. I'd never had a German car before and so I was very excited. I took it to gas it up and I didn't know what kind of fuel it took. There were three options, diesel, regular premium. I didn't know which to run. So I check in the glove box. Okay, it takes regular gas. So I check the diesel off. Not gonna put diesel in it. Now I have a choice. I run the regular or I run the premium. I'm young, I'm in my 20's, I'm broke I'm poor, what do I choose? The regular? I can't afford the premium. That's fancy gas. And so I put the regular gas in it. I'd start driving the car. It runs really, really rough. The guy comes up to me, he had a couple 100,000 miles, but he tuned it well, it was well-maintained. He says, "How's the car?" I said, "Runs really rough." He's like, "What kind of gas do you put it in?" I said, "You know, the regular gas." He said, "No, it only runs on premium." He said, "It'll run on regular, but it'll run really rough, put premium in it, it'll run way better." I put premium in it he was a prophet. It ran better. This was wrong. But I found out it could go 140 miles an hour on premium. That's what I found out. Pastor Mark you are over the line. I've repented and come back. So the point is this. God made your soul to run on a fuel, okay? What would have happened if I put diesel in the tank? Seize the motor. I put regular in the tank, it ran rough. I put premium in the tank it performed well. Your soul either runs on the demonic. And if you run on the demonic, you are going to seize your soul. You are going to become an evil, broken, jaded, self-righteous, devastating, harmful person. If you run on the flesh, your life will run rough. You're gonna make foolish decisions. You're gonna cause pains, problems, and perils. You're gonna give burdens to people. Your life is going to be rough. It will run, but it will run rough in the flesh. If you run in the spirit, you're gonna perform a peak performance. You're gonna have the fruit of the spirit. You're gonna have the power of the spirit. You're gonna have the presence of the spirit. And I love you so much with all my heart. And I want you to live in the spirit. I don't want you to live in the flesh and I don't want you to live in the demonic. And so sometimes literally it's just stopping and saying, okay God, I need the Holy Spirit. I need your power to come down from heaven. I need you to lift my burdens. I need you to heal my hurts. I need you to help me forgive my enemies. I need you to give me that fuel that my soul was created to run on so that the best version of me

could be a blessing to others. So let me just close with this. Do you need endurance today? How many of you, you're just tired. You're just worn down. I was like I can't do this anymore. I can't go anymore. He says that the Holy Spirit will give you endurance. You can keep going. How many of you need encouragement today? It's a rough season. You're discouraged. Maybe you've gotten some bad news. Maybe the future is looking rather ominous the Holy Spirit right now he wants to meet with you. And you may not understand this, but this is a time when the Holy Spirit has appointed to meet with you, to give to you what you need. And he says that the Holy Spirit will come to give you encouragement. And he comes to give harmony, how many of you right now there are relationships. They're divided. They're difficult. They're discordant. You're not... It's like Grace and I were earlier this week. He wants to come and bring harmony. He wants you in that person to align in love and freedom and the spirit and forgiveness so that you can live in harmony. I'll just tell you this. God did this for Grace and I and we had harmony this morning and there was a peace in our home. And we prayed together and I texted her a little hard emoji and she texted me one back. So I gotta quit this sermon and get home. There's harmony at my house. How many of you, you felt rejected, you felt outcast like you didn't fit or the people that were for you suddenly were against you or the people who were with you they abandon you. What he says is the Holy Spirit comes to welcome you. To welcome you into God's presence, where you'll never be rejected or I disowned. How many of you, you're struggling and you need help right now, it says that the holy spirit will come to you serve. And he comes as the helper, the paraklete, the helper. Where do you need help? Where do you need God to serve you? The good news is our God is humble enough that he's willing to serve us. And where and how can the Holy Spirit come right now to serve you. In addition, it talks about the Jews and the Gentiles. How many of you, you don't know Jesus yet, but this is the day of your salvation that you have problems out here, but what you really need is to fix the problem up there and then have Him help you with all the problems out there. Is this the time when you give yourself to Jesus, when the Holy Spirit opens your heart, you say, I love Jesus today. I believe in Jesus today. I belong to Jesus today. I'm walking with Jesus starting today. The Holy Spirit is here to make that possible. And then he talks about hope. How many of you right now, the news you're getting is not very helpful. The data that is coming to you is rather concerning, but God says, "I'm over it, I love you. "I have a plan for you. "I'll never leave you nor forsake you. "I'll never betray you or abandoned you. "I've never lied to you and I'm always here for you." The Holy Spirit comes to give you hope. And then he talks about joy and peace. I love you so much I want you to have joy, not joy in what is happening out there, but what the Holy Spirit is doing in here. That you're growing in character and wisdom, Christ's likeness, and the result is peace. A peace in you that is supernatural. A peace that emanates from you that brings calm into difficult situations that helps to bring order where there is conflict and disorder, that you would bring a spirit, a Holy Spirit of joy and peace into your marriage, into your home, into your relationships, into your workplace. That the spirit of God would work so strongly in and through you that there would be the presence of the joy and the peace of the Kingdom of God. I'm gonna pray for you. And you're gonna meet with the Holy Spirit. I don't know what he's gonna say to you. I don't know how he's gonna minister to you. I don't know what you need from Him, but I would ask you to ask Him to provide for you what you need from Him. Holy Spirit, we invite you to come down now and to just anoint these dear people for whom Jesus Christ died. God, I thank you for the

honor of teaching the Bible. I love these people with all my heart. I'm so proud of their progress. I'm so encouraged by their growth. I'm so inspired by their resilience. And Father, you are a good Father and just as a big brother in this church family, God, there are people who need you, that their life doesn't work without you, that their relationships can't be reconciled without you, that their emotional health can't begin without you. So Jesus, we thank you for the way you treat us and we invite the Holy Spirit to come and to bring us whatever it is that each individual person needs. Holy Spirit right now, would you minister to them? Would they sense your presence? Would they sense your provision? Would they sense your pleasure? God, would you lift their burdens? Would you heal their hurts? Would you help them to forgive their enemies? Would you help them to walk in obedience? Would you help them to accept and acknowledge where your line is? Would you help them to put an arm around those who are hurting and God, as we come together now we just invite you Holy Spirit into our midst that we might obey what the scriptures say and sing in harmony together by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the name of Jesus I pray. Amen. Love you, thank you.

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