

BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

Accept Christians Who Differ from You
Romans 14:1-4, 13-19; 15:1-7

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

Leaders' Responsibilities:

Important: Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a Unit of sessions needs to have access to the "Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study". That information is often provided at the beginning of that Unit of sessions. The weekly session "Background" located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day's study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.

2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)

3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

Prior to this Coming Session:

Gathering Time Leader:

Option 1: Collect photos of people in ethnic dress

Option 2: Ask adults and particularly children to dress in clothing that represents a different cultural group (kilts, moccasins, babushkas, dirndl skirts, lederhosen, etc.

Prepare music in advance.

Bible Study Leader:

Leader: Please note that the “Bible Study Plan” (your teaching guide) for this session may well be far too detailed and long for your group to finish in the time (usually about 35 minutes) allowed for the Bible study. You may need to highlight some of the material ahead of time as you prepare to teach that you want to leave out. Please do not allow the study to make it difficult for the Worship Time leader to do his or her part in bringing the service to a meaningful conclusion.

Provide paper and pens for the **Youth!!! Take Ten** Bible study application time.

Worship Time Leader:

Ask an appropriate person to give a testimony (see worship instructions) See “Beginning the Service” in the **Worship Time**. Ask him or her several days in advance.

Prepare music in advance.

Music Sources:

We Have Come Into His House, *The Worship Hymnal* #666; CCLI #17212 (Words not available)

My Jesus I Love Thee, *The Worship Hymnal* #552; CCLI #27817 Public Domain

Tell the Good News, *The Worship Hymnal* #360; CCLI #109876

The Servant Song, *The Worship Hymnal* #384; CCLI #72763

Gathering Time: (Suggested time: 15 minutes)***Accept Christians Who Differ from You*****Focal Text**

Romans 14:1-4, 13-19; 15:1-7

Background Text

Romans 14:1-15:13

Main Idea

Christians should follow Christ in accepting people who practice their faith in Christ in different ways.

Question to Explore

How accepting are you of people who practice their faith in Christ in ways different from yours?

Teaching Aim

To lead participants to identify judgmental attitudes they may have toward fellow Christians and decide to put such attitudes aside.

Gathering together:

Begin by singing together: **We Have Come Into His House**

Seek opinions from the group: What is one food that other people eat that you think you could never eat? Try to get a response from several people. They may include worms, snakes, goat cheese, dogs, “hominy”, monkeys, rats, lima beans or any other unusual foods.

Now tell them: The old saying that “Enjoying a certain food demands an acquired taste” applies to more than food. It too often and sadly applies to our acceptance of people who differ from us. Overcoming this problem depends on our closeness to our Lord.

First thoughts:

Comment on the variety in clothing styles using either the pictures you have collected or by referring to the items of clothing worn by members of the group. Suggest that some of the garments are not simply for adornment but have a very practical purpose. For example the woollen kilt becomes a blanket at night, a sari is cool to wear in a hot climate; the sombrero protects its wearer from the hot sun. People around the world have developed clothing and customs that add to their sense of community. Similarly, churches have various styles of worship and music they prefer. It's important to realize that being different is not wrong. Variety can enrich a church but should never become a source of conflict.

Question the church: Can you think of any way you are different from everyone else here today?

Comment: No two people are alike. Our personalities, maturity, experiences, and temperaments set us apart from each other.

Sometimes it is very difficult to accept people who are different.

Ask for ways in which your home church could become more diverse. If that happened, what should we do to be more accepting of each other?

Closing the Gathering Time:

Say: Interestingly, Jesus, during his life on earth, did not look like most of us, dress as we do, eat the foods we enjoy, or speak the language we use. How accepting would we be of such a person? Would he or she be welcome in our church? Would we want that person to take a leadership role in our church? Today we will study these important questions and how God's Word responds to them.

Continue: Some time ago we studied, in the **Book of Acts**, how the early Jewish Christians learned to accept the fact that Gentiles could be saved without becoming just like the Jews who still followed their own culture and traditions. Today, we look into **Romans** to see how God wants us to accept other Christians who bring to us deeply held Christian cultures and traditions of their own—plus very different personalities.

Have someone pray thanking God that we are unique as individuals, but we are one in the bonds of Christ's love. Pray that our church will be open to all—not just people like us.

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

2

Copy this section for the Bible Study leader.

Note to the Bible Study Leader: Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

Teacher Preparation

Accept Christians Who Differ from You

Focal Text

Romans 14:1-4, 13-19; 15:1-7

Background Text

Romans 14:1-15:13

Main Idea

Christians should follow Christ in accepting people who practice their faith in Christ in different ways.

Question to Explore

How accepting are you of people who practice their faith in Christ in ways different from yours?

Teaching Aim

To lead participants to identify judgmental attitudes they may have toward fellow Christians and decide to put such attitudes aside.

Introduction to your personal study:

Imagine for a minute that you have been attending worship services that last one hour and fifteen minutes: that the service is made up of congregational singing, offering, special music and a thirty minute sermon. Men, women and children sit together throughout the room. Then transport yourself to a service that lasts a minimum of three hours. Men and women sit on opposite sides of the room. The women all have some type of head covering and never speak inside the building. What are some of the reactions you might have? How might you feel about the people in this type of service? How willing would you be to accept these people?

Background:

Please ask for and read the information contained in the “**Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study**”, found at the beginning of this Unit. Whoever downloaded this session for you should have that material for you as well.

There was dissension in the church at Rome. Some of the believers were Jews, trained to observe the various ceremonies regarding meats and special Jewish days. Since becoming Christians they had not yet come to understand the canceling of the ceremonial law through the death of Christ. The Gentile Christians understood the freedom that Christ's sacrifice bestowed on his followers. Christians were commanded to include in the fellowship those who were weak in the faith.

Focusing on the Meaning:

Concern with Diet Laws (Romans 14:1-4)

Romans 14:1 The weak could be those who were not yet free from Jewish tradition. Some had concerns about the Jewish rules prohibiting followers from eating or drinking certain kinds of food or drink. Other Christians had concerns about eating meat that perhaps had been offered as sacrifices to idols. The early church must have been troubled and perhaps divided about the question of meat and drink, ceremonial defilement and observance of festival days. Those who were strong in their faith were to be accepting and non-judgmental of those who had other views and understandings.

Romans 14:2 The person who was settled in his beliefs was comfortable with what he could eat and drink as well as the days he worshipped. The weak of faith, one who was less grounded, was more scrupulous in his/her diet and the days he/she worshipped. Those with a more Jewish background would be concerned about “unclean” food or anything that had been prepared by Gentiles. However, Paul's instructions about accepting one another do not warrant a church receiving as a member those who have no Christian beliefs and practices.

Romans 14:3 The man who feels it is permissible to eat all foods is not to belittle the man who feels it is sinful to participate in eating certain foods. The reverse is true also. The man who feels certain foods are unclean and does not eat them is not to look down on the man who has no problems eating them. Both sides must seek to mend the breach. God has accepted both men. A person must not put down another who God owns.

Romans 14:4 The Christian is not to judge another. It is not the right of an individual to judge another's servant. The master is God and all Christians are his servants. It is the right only of the master to evaluate those who serve him. This should be a comfort to all that we do not have to be the judge and jury of someone's acts. We do not have to assume this responsibility that belongs to God alone. Both strong and weak Christians can be assured that God is able to support them.

Stumbling Blocks (Romans 14:13-19)

Romans 14:13 We are to stop judging our Christian brothers and sisters. Christians are to quit criticizing other believers. We must determine not to do anything that will make it difficult for other believers to live as they should. Any act or course of conduct that tends to provoke others to sin may be considered a “stumbling block” or an “obstacle”. “Stumbling block” was regarded as a large object over which a person would be likely to fall. “Obstacle” was thought of as a trap or a smaller and more hidden impediment that might cause a person to fall or that might get in his way.

Romans 14:14 As a believer, Paul states that he is positive that no food or drink is unclean or prohibited. This seems to be an affirmation that Moses’ laws prohibiting certain kinds of food were no longer binding. He says the Lord Jesus Christ persuaded him that this was so. Paul agrees with the strong Christian on his views of what is clean and unclean. However, if the strong Christian makes extreme use of his liberty then Paul cautions that the Christian must exercise wisdom. He continues by saying that if an individual’s conscience said that it was unclean, then it was unclean to that person. The same act or attitude could be clean to one believer and unclean to another believer. This is based on each person’s belief. Individuals are not always right when following their consciences. Conscience is not the ultimate standard, because conscience is formed by the early teachings of our childhood. However, acting in opposition to one’s conscience will cause guilty feelings, which must be respected by other Christians.

Romans 14:15 If a Christian’s eating of a particular food is offensive and against the belief of another Christian, then the eating Christian is not acting in love. He is acting under the motivation of something other than love. We are commanded not to let our behavior destroy a fellow believer - one for whom Christ died.

Romans 14:16 Christians were not to allow what they perceived to be good to be disparaged. The mature Christian’s liberty relating to the eating of meats was good, but they needed to be cautious in the use of it. It should not become the reason for division of the church. A person’s strong faith was not to be a reason for battle and division that could be disparaged by non-Christians.

Romans 14:17 The kingdom of God is explained in negative and positive senses. Eating or drinking did not determine it. True religion does not consist of such external acts. It is made of inner attributes: righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Romans 14:18 The individual who really serves Christ has cultivated these three great graces: righteousness, peace, and joy. Two benefits of this kind of life are these: first, it pleases God and secondly, men approve of it.

Romans 14:19 We are to do what causes peace and builds up each other. We are to eagerly work to achieve these qualities. The individual Christian and the church as a whole are pictured as a building. We must strive to improve on the character of both. The strong Christian can either help demolish the building or assist in building it up.

Love - A pattern Romans 15:1-3a

Romans 15:1 The stronger Christian is to act not to bring satisfaction to himself, but to help the weak. Paul takes the side of the strong Christian as theoretically right. This adds to his appeal for the weak. No believer can separate himself from others in a way that he can live for himself alone. Living for one's self alone seems to be the guiding principle for most human action. Christ sets the example of living for others, rather than for self. Not despising but accepting the weaknesses of the immature, and living with their ignorance and narrow prejudices shows strength. The really strong individuals place love against both conscience and knowledge. They seek to follow Christ's example.

Romans 15:2 The strong believer is to build up the neighbor and promote his spiritual growth. We are to choose these activities based on two criteria; it is right in God's eyes and it builds up the neighbor's righteousness and Christian character. Love, when extended to the weak, offers more help than argument and criticism could accomplish.

Scripture teaches love Romans 15:3b-4

Romans 15:3 The brothers are reminded that even Christ did not act to please himself. He took the sins of all of us on himself. He did not act for his own welfare and position. This example of Christ was to serve as a model for believers. Jesus was both the sacrifice for sin and the model of behavior.

Romans 15:4 In looking to the past, Paul recalls that all that was written was given to teach us. The scriptures were given to help us have patience in accepting the weaknesses of others and to encourage us to endure any inconveniences that this acceptance might cause. In Psalm 69:9, one reads, "...the insults of those who insult you fall on me." This may refer to Jesus as a model for believers who must face the condemnation of the unbelievers. The apostle believed the Old Testament had its fullest significance for Christians as the completion of its prophecy. The Old Testament was, for these early Christians, the inspiration that kept their hope alive. "Hope" is the Christian's special hope, the hope of glory. Christians die with two great assurances: that Jesus forgave our sin and gave us eternal life.

A prayer for oneness Romans 15:5-6

Romans 15:5 Paul verbalizes a prayer for the Roman Christians. He asks that God, who gives endurance and encouragement, would also give a spirit of unity as together they follow and serve Jesus. He prayed that they might have the spirit of agreement among themselves, based on the life of Christ. The practices of refraining from eating meat and worshiping on Saturday on one side and Christian freedom on the other side provoked tensions that were not to threaten the unity of their fellowship.

Romans 15:6 The purpose of this unity among the brethren was to glorify God. In all ways their lives together were to bring honor to God. The mention of both God and Jesus is one of the first steps in the New Testament writings that move from the worship of one God to the concept of the trinity.

Romans 15:7 They were to accept one another. This was to be an active receiving of one another. Christ was to be their model in this regard. The fact that Jesus received us is the reason why we should accept one another. Again he mentions the purpose, to bring praise and honor to God. Glorifying God was Jesus' purpose.

Your Goal as the Leader of this Bible Study:

Three principles grow out of Jesus' mission. Your task as the leader and guide of this study is to make clear these points to your church:

One Jesus is the only king in his church.

Two The Bible is the binding rule of belief and practice for his people and church.

Three God's glory should be the goal of all Christian action.

For Personal Reflection:

1. **What have I learned from this study?**

2. **What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?**

3. **What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?**

Bible Study Plan (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

Accept Christians Who Differ from You

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc.

Begin by helping the group locate the Focal Text in their Bibles. Also, share with them the Main Idea to be learned from the Scriptures, and the Questions to be Explored by the group.

Focal Text

Romans 14:1-4, 13-19; 15:1-7

Background Text

Romans 14:1-15:13

Main Idea

Christians should follow Christ in accepting people who practice their faith in Christ in different ways.

Question to Explore

How accepting are you of people who practice their faith in Christ in ways different from yours?

Teaching Aim

To lead participants to identify judgmental attitudes they may have toward fellow Christians and decide to put such attitudes aside.

Connect with Life:

Leader: Please note that the “Bible Study Plan” (your teaching guide) for this session may well be far too detailed and long for your group to finish in the time (usually about 35 minutes) allowed for the Bible study. You may need to highlight some of the material ahead of time as you prepare to teach that you want to leave out. Please do not allow the study to make it difficult for the Worship Time leader to do his or her part in bringing the service to a meaningful conclusion.

Open by presenting this: In Christian gatherings there are often different opinions on dress, behavior, and expectations of what and how things should happen. In many groups there are varying emotionally-based opinions about what kind of music should be played. Opinions differ as to whether men and women should dress in their best clothes to attend worship or dress in casual clothes. Is it appropriate for a person to loudly say “Amen” in the service? Is it acceptable to raise your hands in silent praise? Should we use hymnbooks or can you enjoy mostly praise choruses written out or projected on a screen. Is it wrong to have guitars and drums used during the music part of the service? What translation of the Bible should be used?

Serious fellowship problems have come in some groups in seeking to answer these questions. This study seeks to respond to the question, “How do we accept Christians who differ with us?” In a small home-based church, the question may challenge us even more than in larger groups.

Guide the Study:

Tell the group: The Christians at Rome were having dissension.

Suggest: Let’s read Romans 14:1-4 to see what the problem was.

Request a person to read Romans 14:1-4

Pose this question: What was the problem they were having with each other? (They could not agree on what food was “clean” or “unclean” for Christians to eat. There were problems about “eating meat that had been offered as sacrifice to idols”. There were questions about what day to worship on. There were other divisions about what was legal to drink).

Say: Paul attempted to heal the breach in their fellowship by giving them a commandment in v. 1. He tells them, “Accept him whose faith is weak”.

Call for an answer to the question: What is the provision that Paul adds to the commandment? (We are not to pass judgment on disputable matters.)

Now present this thought: What are some disputable matters you have experienced or heard about in Christian fellowships? Home churches have their various opinions as well as larger churches. These might include, but are not limited to, questions about shared leadership, women’s roles, length of worship services, how to use offerings given, when is it time and how do you create another church out of the one you presently have, varying doctrinal positions, and differing political stances which each one assumes to be Biblically based.

Look to someone to answer this: What does Paul say we are to do? (We are to accept the other person without passing judgment on him for his view on a particular question).

Now pose this: How rigid and non-flexible is “faith?”

Guide the group to this: Look in v. 2 to discover what faith permits, what it authorizes. (One person’s faith permits certain activities; another person’s faith does not permit the same activities).

Now shift to this question: In v. 3 what is to be the attitude of the person who does these activities toward the person who cannot do the same things? (He is not to condemn the one who does not).

Continue with this thought: Also in v. 3 what is to be the attitude of the person who cannot do these activities toward the person who can do these activities? (He is not to condemn the one who does).

Seek an answer to this question: Also in v. 3, what is God’s attitude toward both believers? (He has accepted them.)

Now ask: What does this say to you? (One possible answer is that God is not as concerned about some of these issues as we are.)

Share the following with the church: The writer of this teaching plan went from a church that was traditional in its singing and using hymnbooks to a church that had drums and guitars and sang praise songs projected on a screen. He concluded that his faith in God did not rest on what songs he sang or what musical instruments were used. His faith rested on his personal experience with Jesus Christ in repentance and faith. He recognized he had personal preferences in these and other areas, but that his faith was not dependent on these.)

Follow with these questions:

In v. 4, What is the question Paul asks? (Who are you to judge someone else’s servant?)

Who whom is the servant responsible? (To his master, the Lord)

Who are you responsible to for the opinions and feelings you have? (To God)

To whom is the person who has different views responsible? (To God)

State: Paul in Romans 14:13-19 continues to guide the Roman Christians to understand how to relate to one another. Let’s read that passage.

Ask: What two steps does he give? Wait for responses? (One, stop making judgments and two, don’t put a stumbling block in your brother’s way)

Ask these questions: Have any of you ever stumbled? Was it a big obstacle? Could it have been of lesser importance? Get responses.

Explain v. 14 and 15: Paul tells us in these verses that he is sure that there is no food or drink prohibited to the Christian. But he does say, that if a person's conscience tells him that it is unclean, then it is unclean and one should not participate. If a Christian brother is going to stumble because of the action a stronger Christian is taking, then the stronger should not do that action. He goes ahead and tells us that if the stronger individual continues with an activity he feels is acceptable, but that the weaker Christian feels is wrong, then the stronger should abstain from it.

Solicit ideas for this: What are some actions we might feel are acceptable that could cause anxiety for a weaker Christian? Get members to respond. (They might include some of these: eating in a public place on Sunday after worship, reading certain magazines or viewing certain movies or videos, weeding the garden on Sunday, wearing of skimpy clothes in public)

Question the group: What are we to do if someone is offended by these actions? (We are not to use our liberty to do things that would discourage other Christians)

Look for guidance at this point: How is the kingdom of God explained in v. 17? Let pupils respond. (True religion does not consist of eating or drinking or not eating or drinking. It is made up of inner attitudes such as righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.)

Seek an opinion: What two results are there when a person is serving God in this way? See v. 18 for the answer. (We please God and men approve us.)

Tell the congregation: In v. 19 Paul urges Christians to do everything necessary to have peace and to encourage the mutual growth of all the members.

Say: In Romans 15:1-2 Paul gives us the pattern for our behavior. He gives us a procedure to follow in determining how we live.

Now pose this question: What pattern are we to follow? (We are to accept and live with the failings of the weak. We are to please the other for his good, to help him be built up.)

Quote this: We must not to live to satisfy ourselves but to encourage others. Even if we are right we must not make it difficult for the weaker Christian. A believer cannot separate himself from others and live for himself alone.

Look for an answer to this: What example in v. 3 does Paul put before us as the way we are to live? (Jesus)

Ask: What motivation did Jesus have to respond as he did? (Not to please himself but to demonstrate love)

Pose this query: Why were we given the scripture as stated in v. 4? (To teach us to have hope)

Say: Paul prays a prayer for the Roman Christians in v. 5-6.

Then have a person read Romans 15:5-6.

Now seek an answer to: What request does Paul pray for? (Spirit of unity among the church that glorifies God)

Present these questions. Give participants time to respond to each of these questions. Give them time to talk about the disastrous results that come from disunity.

Have you ever seen a church that had disunity?

Did it glorify God during that time?

What kind of influence did it have in the community?

What happened to some of the members?

Move on to this question: In v. 7 what reason does Paul give for accepting one another? (Because Christ accepted us)

Ask: Why should we accept others? (To bring praise to God)

Again: What are the results of unity in a fellowship? (Possible answers: true worship, love of each other, comradeship, concern for those outside the fellowship, etc.)

Encourage Application:

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to go away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

Solicit opinions to this key question: What are some things some Christians do that dishearten other believers? (Possible responses: talking about other's weaknesses, gossiping, striving for influence, and doing questionable things in their lives)

Request the group to think silently for a moment about the following questions:

Question yourself. Ask yourself: What are some things in my life that might be a hindrance to others in this group?

What is my attitude toward other Christians who dress differently, worship differently, believe differently, and behave differently?

Finally, Set out this important action question: What can we do to be more accepting of these? (Possible responses: pray for them as individuals, pray that we can see them as God sees them, fellowship with them)

Conclude by asking a person to lead in this prayer request to God: Ask God to make us conscious of judgmental attitudes we have and to be able to accept these fellow servants of Him.

<p>Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time. Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.</p>
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Youth!!! Take Ten

Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

Accept Christians Who Differ from You **Romans 14:1-4, 13-19; 15:1-7**

A youth will lead the following activity and comments. No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

Distribute slips of paper and pencils and write your answers to the following questions.

1. What is your favourite vegetable?
2. What is your favourite color?
3. What is your favourite movie (or music group)?

As each of you answers, note the variety of responses. Ask: Are any of these answers wrong?

Would God consider it a sin to enjoy eating spinach and like the movie character "Shrek" but to hate the color orange?

These are personal preferences or choices based on what we like and dislike but they should not ever affect how we relate to other people.

Ask: How important is it to you that your friends dress in ways you approve?

How would your friends feel if you became close friends with someone who was obviously different than your group? Would you be willing for them to criticize you?

Being Jesus' friend and follower can make you very different from other youth. Have you experienced criticism because you are a Christian?

Pray that each of you will reach out to other teens who are different and that you will be willing to share in their life even if it means criticism.

Worship Time (Suggested time: 30 minutes)***Accept Christians Who Differ from You*****Romans 14:1-4, 13-19; 15:1-7****Beginning the Service:**

If there is someone attending who is from another country or who is “different” from most in the group, ask this person to give a testimony about what it means to be accepted by the home church group.

Ask a youth or adult to thank God for the diversity in the group. (Age, gender, occupations, heritage, Christian maturity)

Say: Regardless of our differences, we all share the blessings of knowing God's forgiveness and Jesus' love. Our mutual response to these blessings is the love we have for Jesus. Let's sing **My Jesus, I Love Thee**.

Offering:**Praying for the World:**

There are many ethnic churches in Canada—as there are today in many nations of the world. These are congregations that meet together sharing a common language, country of origin, cultural values, or traditional worship patterns. The social aspects appeal to immigrant people groups--opportunities to speak their native tongue, connections that alleviate loneliness, familiar customs, and food. These churches thrive because they place value on unity and realize the importance of preserving common bonds.

Visiting one of these churches is a very positive experience because outsiders are not excluded but given a warm welcome. Our church needs to exhibit warmth and acceptance so that visitors will feel at home. How can we improve in this area?

Sharing Guide:

This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God's call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.

Christian Conduct for Conflict

Romans 14:13-15:6

Introduction:

When a jogger begins his or her run, his body wants to go. It is good for a person to exercise. Running is a good way to exercise. But it doesn't take very long for one's body to rebel. Breathing gets difficult and the heart says, "I don't want to go!" The feet say, "I'm hurting, please stop." Muscles complain about being overworked. One's body seems to fall apart. There is no unity until the runner gets a second wind, then the pain and complaining stop. Bodily unity returns.

The reality of social relationships reveals that conflict is unavoidable. The Christian should not seek to incite conflict. There are times when conflict can't be avoided. Paul confronts conflict among Christians in the Roman church over eating meat that had been offered to idols. He lays down timeless principles for Christian conduct in conflict. The point is when you confront conflict, be Christ-like!

I. Be Christ-like. Do not cause others to stumble.

Your example is very important. Your life speaks for itself. Do you have any idea who is watching you? A man tells of an incident when his son was about 4 years old. The son watched his dad constantly. One day the man, trying to be funny, started walking in a very strange way. His son and wife were right behind him. The son began walking just like his father while the wife turned away embarrassed. Parents are aware that their actions will be copied by their children. But there are many other people we don't notice who look to us for an example of the Christian life.

Paul gives us some guidelines for being an example. He insists we are not to cause others to stumble. He tells us to stop judging other people (v. 13). He is not talking about judgmental discretion, but about a hypercritical attitude that becomes a stumbling block to many who are watching. Our actions must be governed by the love Christ exemplifies in our lives (v. 15). The Holy Spirit directs our actions be done in righteousness, peace, and joy (v. 17). God desires that we live a life that is pleasing to God and man (v. 18).

Children have watched Batman, Superman, and Spiderman for decades. The message parents want them to take from the example of these super heroes is, "Don't do as they do! You can't fly!"

We must serve as examples to new and immature Christians. They especially watch us handle adversity. If we judge, say harsh word to others, or respond in anger, they will follow our example. We must be Christ-like as we deal with conflict.

II. Be Christ-like. Do not injure God's Work.

The Christian's goal in fellowship must be peace and mutual up-building. We must pursue this by giving God's work priority. The good of the fellowship must be put above our personal rights. Jesus told us we must be last if we wish to be first (Mark 9:35). Paul tells us to "make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" (v. 19). He says we are not to "destroy the work of God" (v.20) over something as trivial as "food." We could certainly add a long list to "food." Paul adds "...or do anything else that will cause your brother to fall" (v. 21). If we are under the influence of the Holy Spirit we will be careful how we live because others are watching. We will also be careful whom we watch as our examples. Jesus is to be our example.

III. Be Christ-like. Do not seek your own way.

Families love vans. One family had three boys and drove a small Honda Civic. The boys were always battling for space. "He touched me." "He won't give me my turn by the window" were constantly heard on family outings. The family decided to get a Ford Station Wagon with a huge back seating area. The boys continued to argue and crowd each other. The family finally graduated to a Chevrolet Suburban. Each child had his own row. Ah, the sweet sound of silence! As the children grew, they learned about sharing. Traveling was a joy because no one insisted on his way, but each thought of the other.

Jesus is the ultimate example of selflessness. Matthew records in 20:28 that Christ "came not to be served but to serve!" In Romans 5:1-6, Paul tells us to build up our neighbour by pleasing him for his good. That requires consideration for each other. We must encourage each other. We must learn to cope with adversity which leads to fortitude. We must have hope, harmony, and praise as we serve Christ together. All of Paul's teaching can be summed up: others before self!

Call to Commitment:

The Old Testament story of Joseph is still thrilling today. Joseph was a favourite of his father. His brothers conspired to kill him, but sold him into slavery and certain death. They had no way of knowing he would one day be the second in command in Egypt. Nor could they have imagined they would one day stand before him asking for food. One of the most dramatic moments in the Old Testament is in Genesis 45:3 when Joseph revealed himself as the brother they had sold into slavery. As the truth sank in,

fear overwhelmed them. Joseph was Christ-like in his forgiveness of them. Oh, that we could have such a heart of God in us. Our fellowship would be so much stronger. How is your heart today?

Concluding the Service:

A young woman who, since that time, has served as a missionary all of her adult life once said: ***“How very sad the world would be if everyone else were just like me!”*** She not only held the truth in that simple poem, she celebrates it every day of her life as she relates to students, friends, church members, and everyone she meets.

We've been discussing acceptance, tolerance, and unity. Perhaps you have sensed the need for an attitude adjustment today. The best way to reinforce a change in attitude is to act on it. If you hold feelings of resentment toward a fellow-Christian over a preference, let go of it and find an opportunity to test your resolve. If you are intimidated by people who are different, find someone who belongs to that particular segment of society and get to know them personally.

Sing **The Servant Song**.