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ROMANS 15:1

Romans Series: How God Changes People

Romans 15:1. Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we are grateful for the leaders you are raising up here at Calvary Chapel in different ways. Thank you for these young people leading worship today, for Dom running the slides at the back. Lord, we're grateful for the way you're working in this next generation and we ask that you would raise up a new generation of leaders that love you and serve you. We want to be that kind of a church that's equipping them and empowering them. We ask that you would bring more young people to us. Lord, we thank you for your word and the power that it has to change our lives. We ask that we wouldn't just look at your word as an idea book or take the ideas as if they were just some simple success principles, but we'd see your word as a valuable tool to get to know you better, to know how you've designed us, how you've created us, how you've empowered us to live the life you want us to live. Now we're going to open your word and as we do we ask that you would speak to us. We don't know whether you're going to say something big or you're going to say something small, but we know you're going to speak. And so we ask you to do that in our lives today. In Jesus' name, amen.

How many of you have known someone who was strong or successful, but then they failed? Maybe it was a pastor who got involved with sexual immorality. Or maybe it was a movie star who failed in a relationship. Or maybe it was a successful businessman who became addicted to alcohol. Or maybe it was a teen who had the ability to be strong and academic, things were going well, but then got mixed up in the wrong crowd and that person failed. The list goes on and on, but I want you to know that today I'm going to share with you one idea, one principle, one verse from God's word, and this one verse is strategic because what it does is it shares the solution that that person who failed didn't recognize and didn't understand. If they had known this, or maybe I should say if they would have practiced this one principle, then they would be more successful and they would've been able to handle their strength and their success more effectively.

This one verse comes from Romans 15:1. It reads this way – *We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.*

This is a verse that's for the strong people. Now before you write me off and say, "This must not be for me because I'm not strong," let me remind you of two things. One is you're a lot stronger than you think. You can always find someone who's weaker than you are. So you can take whatever strength you have and use it to help others who have failings. You are stronger than you think.

The second thing I want you to know is that this is a principle you have to start now even if you're not as strong as you will be someday. Because it's a principle that grows with you. You don't wait till later to start this principle and develop it in your life. What you want to do is you want to have this principle embedded in your heart now so that it is growing in you so that you won't be tempted to please yourself when you become strong, but rather you'll be able to use the strength that God has given you or the success that God has given you to bear with the failings of the weak. If we get this one idea down we'll have accomplished something very important.

There are two things that draw us and all humanity together. One of those things is that we are all created in the image of God. Now that's a very interesting concept. To think that God stamped His image into us when He created us is fascinating. God loves us so much that He created us in essence as little images of who He is. That in and of itself makes every one of us a very valuable person of tremendous value and we can look inside and see God in us, and we can enjoy that privilege. That's just a beautiful thing that God has stamped us in the image of Himself.

The second thing that we know about all humanity is that we are all fallen people. We have sinned. Because of that sin and the sin that exists in our world, we have all kinds of challenges that we face. In fact I would suggest that we are all broken people. We're all fallen people. We are all weak people in a number of different ways. That weakness is a challenge in our lives and we need help to deal with that weakness. Ultimately the strength that comes comes from knowing Jesus Christ personally.

The verse that we're going to look at today is written to people who are already Christians. So I don't want you to think that by practicing this not being a Christian you'll have somehow gained favor before God. This is something that you're doing after you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. So if you haven't made that decision yet, that's the decision you want to make.

Now it's because of this fullness and this image of God that we have there's this dynamic going on inside of us that's a challenge that we face. That's what makes this verse so important. *We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.*

We who are strong. I fell in love with the idea of strength when I was a little child. I wanted to be strong. My dad had big muscles, probably the biggest muscles ever, and I could see that and I really enjoyed his big muscles and enjoying the strength that he had in life. But when I was nine years old there became a new show on TV. That show was *Batman*.

Now I was nine and my brother was seven. So I became Batman and he became Robin, and we would dress up with towels pinned around our neck and we would wear our underwear over the top of our pants (unbelievably), and we would run around the house singing the theme song to *Batman* and then we would take our rope and climb the neighbor's fence and so on in order to demonstrate our strength.

Now there's a little bit of that Batman that has remained in my life. So I am still marked by that and it is very important to me to have that kind of strength. Now don't laugh because I know that you own a Batman shirt too! You may not wear it like me, but we all own Batman shirts. It might be your invisible shirt, but we all have this desire to be strong in our lives.

God has empowered us to be strong, so I'm also attracted to verses about strength. Let me show you some of them.

Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and the life to come. I'm into physical exercise. I'm into training. But there's a godliness training that also provides a strength that's inside. That strength is very powerful.

Here's another verse – *You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.* That strength is important and God wants us to have that strength in our lives that helps us to be strong on the inside. It's that grace.

Here's another one. I love this one from Joshua 1:9 where Joshua is being empowered to lead the people and God says to him – *Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.*

I'm into strength, and this passage is written for strong people. You are into strength too. We all have areas of strength in our lives. Together we can care for each other because we all have areas of weakness as well.

In a marriage the best kind of marriage is the one where you're both taking the strengths of each other and wedding them together. So those strengths are powerful and you're enjoying them.

Now I think there's often a misconception about strength that I just want to share with you because some people think that the person who's angry is the person who's strong. All that means is that they have strong emotions and they can't handle them. So the person who's yelling at someone, that's not the strong person. That's the weak person who doesn't have the ability to manage that emotion. But sometimes we look at the person who's yelling and we imagine that person to be strong. Sometimes the person who yells a lot thinks that they are strong. That's not strong. That's weak management of emotions.

I would suggest we need to have an internal strength that's going to help us be able to deal with life. When we have a strength it means that we are more patient with people. It means that we listen to people more. It means that we are not short with people or make cutting remarks at people. That's not being strong. The person who can cut the other person down with their words so quickly, that's not strength. That is weakness. When someone asks you a question that they've already asked and you've already answered, you might feel irritated by that and want to cut them off or be short with them. That's not a sign of strength. Strength is being able to answer the question again without getting irritated by it. We're talking about an inner strength that we can experience. It doesn't come from anger.

I saw this story this week that I want to read to you. This story is told of a visitor who was once staying with Mrs. Wesley when Charles was a little boy. Susannah Wesley was a mother of Charles Wesley, who's an author of many, many different hymns that are sung today, including *Hark! the Herald Angels Sing*. I mean he's the author of many of our hymns. When he was just a young boy this event took place.

Susannah Wesley was the mother of nineteen children (that's enough to test any mother's patience). Charles came in and asked his mother a question, which his mother patiently answered. In five minutes he came back and asked the same question, which his mother answered patiently, as she had done the first time. In fact he asked the same question seven times. The visitor said to her, "Why do you waste time in answering this troublesome boy's question seven times?" "Well," said Mrs. Wesley, "because six times were not enough."

Now I want to suggest that that's strength. Sometimes we get irritated with other people and we just need to realize that sometimes we have to go over that piece of truth again. Some of us aren't as smart as you. Some of us have to catch up with you. So if you can just tell us again a little bit more, we would appreciate that. Being patient is very important.

Now there's a contrast in this verse. I hope you saw it. There's a contrast between helping others and pleasing yourself. That gives us two options here. So this contrast is very important.

The verse reads this way – *We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak* (so we're either going to think about others) or we're going to *please ourselves*. Our goal in life is not to feel good. If that's what you think your goal is in life then you've missed something very important. Our goal is to grow stronger and help others.

It's in doing small jobs that we often help others. Cleaning up after something, even a mess you didn't make. Listening to someone again or someone who tells a long story. Some of us like to talk a lot when trying to communicate a message. Or letting someone else go first. That's what it means to serve others and to help others and to care for them in their weakness. It means that our self-worth is going to come from Jesus Christ. So when we're taxed by the weaknesses of other people, the failings of the weak, we're not so quick to react to them, but we're gentle and patient and kind with those people. God did not put us on this earth to live for ourselves. He created us to be like Christ.

We see in Mark 10 the disciples came to Jesus and one asked, "Can I sit on your left and the other one your right?" And Jesus says, "I can't do that, but greatest is the servant." But then the Bible says just in the verse before this one that the disciples heard that these two disciples had gone to Jesus and asked for the best seat and *they were indignant*, they were angry. You know why they were angry? They wanted the best seat and here these guys were trying to take the best seat. So Jesus comes and He makes this statement. He says, "*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.*"

That's what we are to do. This verse talks about that. *We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.*

Now we can think of all kinds of excuses not to do this. "I'm not very strong. I will serve others and care for the failings of the weak when I get stronger." "I don't have very much money to share. So when I get more money I'll share." "I don't have very much time. I'm so busy. I don't have very much energy. When I get more energy or time then I'll make a change." That's not what it's talking about. It's talking about doing this now. Our mission in life is two things

according to the passage. Grow stronger and help others. It's not that complicated, it's just something we need to do is grow stronger and help others. That's what God would have us to do.

I was intrigued this week to do a little bit of research outside of the Bible and the theology sections where I normally do this. I wanted to see what the world has to say about this idea of volunteering or helping others. I found some interesting things. Now these things don't prove the Bible (the Bible proves them), but it's interesting to see what happens when we look at some of the secular things that are written out there.

Stephen G. Post, PhD, professor of preventative medicine at Stony Brook University in New York and the author of *The Hidden Gifts of Helping* writes – “When people just think about giving, the body doles out feel-good chemicals such as dopamine, which has a soothing effect, and possibly serotonin, one of the brain chemicals we treat depression with. They feel joy and delight–helper's high.”

There's something about helping others that gets you out of your depression, it gets you out of your self-focused tendency. It's a great way for us to be able to think of others and what happens is it does what this passage is talking about, to bear with the failings of the weak.

Here's another quote. “Over 40 international studies confirm that volunteering can add years to your life. In fact, current studies suggest up to 22% reduction in mortality rates! How much do we have to do? Studies confirm that a regular commitment of as little as 25 hours per year is beneficial” helping those, bearing with those who are in need. Just think about the times that you've helped others or you've cared for other people in need. How has it benefited you?

I counsel with families regularly and there's a number of times when I've gone away from a counseling appointment going, “Whoa. I'm telling those people to do that. I should do that myself. I need to go spend some time with my wife or I need to think about my daughter,” or something like that as I'm counseling. Because that's what happens. When you help other people it does something to you. He's saying when you've got a problem and you've got a challenge and you're helping someone with the weakness that they have, then good things can happen.

Now hidden within strength are inherent temptations. Let's talk about those. Because if you're becoming stronger, there are inherent temptations in your strength that you need to watch out for. As you become stronger you start to think things that get you into trouble. Things like “my views are the most correct,” or “my plans are the best,” or “my words are the most important.” So we have a temptation to give a harsh judgment to someone else, or a temptation to boast or self-inflate, or a temptation to be arrogant in our viewpoint, or a temptation to be short with people.

We have to be careful of the temptations and that's why I think Paul wrote in this verse in 1 Corinthians 10:12 – *Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.* Because inherent within the idea of standing or strength or success is this problem, this temptation of arrogance that causes a successful person to fail. It causes a strong person to get in trouble. It causes a young person who's doing well to get themselves in trouble. It's a problem.

So God has given us a solution and it is in Romans 15:1. Let's go back there. *We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.*

Let's go through some of these words that are here.

The word *ought* is the word to owe or to be in debt to. We should feel this sense of obligation that I need to do something. So when you're irritated with someone, you want to overcome the irritation by saying to yourself, "Wow, I need to let this go because I owe this person." Or maybe "I owe the Lord something, therefore I'm going to treat this person kindly." The word *ought* is an important word that describes this idea that I owe someone extra care, extra time, extra love.

The next words that we see there are *bear with* and that means to carry. To carry or to bear with those we can assist. Bear the weight. Sometimes we feel the weight so we want to strike back at that person or be irritated or judge them or be sarcastic or make some kind of cruel remark. Rather we need to carry those and bear with them.

The next word has to do with the *failings of the weak*. What are those failings? Sometimes it's just dealing with or living with annoying people. There are people who are just plain annoying. When they're annoying we bear with the failings of the weak. Some people forget things or they lose things or they talk too much. I don't know what it is that you have a pet peeve about, but maybe your pet peeve is one of those areas where God is saying, "Hey, there's an area where you want to give a little. You want to bear with the failings of the weak. You want to sacrifice in order to help this person.

I want you to think about what grace is, being gracious. If we define gracious I think we can define it this way: Just giving a little bit more time. Gracious is listening a little bit more.

I'm a fast thinker. I can think faster than more people can talk. So when you're talking to me, I'm already planning what I'm going to say. Now if I interrupt you with what I'm going to say because I'm thinking faster than you can talk, I am not being gracious. So sometimes gracious means I'm going to wait and let you finish talking before I give you my answer or my response. Sometimes graciousness is a little bit more time. I think we can look at it as bearing with the failings of the weak. That's what he's saying.

Sometimes I tell husbands (I don't know if wives have this problem too, but I find myself in marriage counseling sometimes saying this to husbands) that before you ask the question you should tell the story. Because sometimes a husband will come in and say, "Where's the whatchamacallit?" And the wife's going, "I don't even know what a whatchamacallit is." "That widget that goes on the end of my thingamajig." And the wife's going, "I have no idea what you're talking about."

So sometimes we as husbands come in, we're down to the point, we want to know the facts, so we come in with the questions. It might be better instead of asking the question to tell the story first. "Hey, I got this whatchamacallit that goes on the end of my widget and I don't know where it is. Can you help me find this? Do you know where it is?" So we tell the story before we ask

the question. It solves a lot of communication problems in a marriage relationship. If we tell the story first it's just a way of bearing with other people and caring for them and loving with them.

I think this is so practical. It's not just about people in general, it's about the people we live with, it's the people we work with, it's the people in our neighborhood, it's the people we come in contact with. What are we going to do? Are we going to please ourselves or are we going to bear with the failings of the weak?

There's a contrast being made there. I think in order for us to be able to bear with the failings of the weak, we must allow some margin in our lives. If we're so busy that we're rushing around and we're short with people or we never have enough money at the end of the month so we have nothing to share, then we are not in a position to bear with the failings of the weak. All we're doing is pleasing ourselves. It's a challenge.

There are several disadvantages of being self-centered. Let me point out some of them. I don't think any of us want to be self-centered, but we find ourselves going there naturally and we want to be spiritual instead. So the disadvantage of self-centeredness is it makes us overly sensitive and easily offended. It's the basis for much of the anger issues that we have is self-centeredness. It breeds dissatisfaction. It's impossible to satisfy the bottomless pit of our desires. So if we're always focusing on our desires, we're always going to be dissatisfied and we'll be complaining and whining about all kinds of things. This selfishness that we experience underlies most conflict between individuals.

So what are we to do instead? We are to help others, to bear with the failings of the weak. That is our life calling. That is what God has called us to do. And He gives us the strength to do it. I know this is hard. This is very hard for us to do because this is spiritual that's He's asking us to do. Our natural tendency is to want to bite back or to make a cutting remark.

Or the opposite of what is described here is the word disgust. Sometimes we look down on someone and go, "Why are those people driving slow in the fast lane?" We have disgust when we see that. We are rather to bear with the failings of the weak. Disgust is the opposite of that. So whenever you find yourself disgusted, think about Romans 15:1. "Maybe I should back off here a bit and I should bear with the failings of the weak." This is a supernatural power that God gives.

Let me show you a verse that's parallel to our passage here, described in Galatians 5:22-26. It says there that the fruit of the Spirit is nine different things. So pick what is best for you. Notice they are *love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*.

I would suggest that graciousness... I want to have my words be more gracious and if I'm to do that, I'm going to put together three of these things. They are going to be gentleness, self-control, and kindness. Put those three together and now I have graciousness. Where do they come from? They come from the Holy Spirit.

When I allow the Holy Spirit to work in my life He produces these things in me. So if you're having a challenge bearing with the failings of the weak then you want to draw on the power of the Holy Spirit to make you a stronger person. *We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not please ourselves.*

But look at the rest of the verse. I think it's fascinating. *Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh* (they're not pleasing themselves) *with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become* (instead of pleasing ourselves he uses this word) *conceited, provoking and envying each other.*

If you got someone who's provoking and envying, you can bet they need this verse because they're focused on pleasing themselves and not bearing with failings of the weak. What a powerful statement.

I was going to teach this whole chapter, but I got stuck here because the Lord was doing some great work in my life in this particular verse. So I thought we'll just meditate on this verse today in Romans 15:1.

But maybe you're here today and saying, "Oh man, this verse isn't for me because I'm really weak. I just feel really weak." So I want to just bring some encouragement to you as I close this. In Isaiah 40:31 we have a passage for us for especially when we feel weak. *But they who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*

God wants to do some work in our lives, but He wants to do some work through us. That's the most important thing in this passage. He wants to work through us, and so that's why He gives us strength. The purpose of strength is so that we can share that with others, we can bear with the failings of the weak.

I trust you'll try to do that this week. God has been speaking to me this week about that and I've been looking for ways to do that as I meet and interact with people. Maybe God will do the same thing in your heart this week as well.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I thank you for the strength that you've provided for each of us. You've given us your grace and you've given us your power that we can enjoy and appreciate. So we just want to thank you for that first of all, but Lord, there are times when we act in the flesh and we act to please ourselves. We are reminded this morning that that is not our task. That our goal in life is not to please ourselves. Our goal in life is to serve others. So Lord, would you please remind us of that this week? Use your Spirit to prompt us, to teach us, to grow us. We want to serve you. We want to grow in your grace and be able to help others as well. Bless us each one, Lord. In Jesus' name, amen.