

Romans 16:1–16 | “Being a Deeper Community, Part 2”

October 20, 2024 by Pastor Matt Brown

You can turn in your Bibles this morning to Romans 16, verse 1. *[pause]*

For the last few weeks I’ve been doing a short series on being a welcoming and deepening community. *[pause]*

We have seen how and why we are to welcome others as they come into these doors, and now this morning we will be finishing out on how and why we are to go deeper with one another. *[pauseeee]*

This series has really flowed out of our desire to grow into becoming more welcoming here, but also to go deeper with each other. *[pause]*

Recently, we conducted a survey at the church, and the results were helpful for us to see that this emphasis is definitely needed. *[pause]*

As I brought out last week, most everyone here desires to have deep relationships, but we don’t always feel like we have them here.¹ *[pause]*

The survey results also showed that we may spend a little bit of time outside of the church building together, but it’s not a lot.²

And lastly, the survey revealed that for the majority of us, we may go deeper with only a few people in a year.³ *[pause]*

So obviously there’s work to be done; there’s room for growth in our relationships.

And now (as people of the Word) we are going to Scripture to help us to have deeper relationships with one another. *[pauseeee]*

I want to READ Romans 16:1–16 for you, and I want you to pay attention to the relationships that Paul had with others. *[READ]*

Sometimes it’s easy for us to just breeze over sections like this in the Bible.

For we just see Paul greeting specific people, and think that it has no application for us, but discard that thinking...

All of God’s Word is important and the greetings are no exception, for something that we see here is that...

¹ 92% want deeper relationships, and 92% feel like their relationships are only average in depth with others in the church.

² Most people (91%) spend time outside of church at least a couple times a year with others. But only 50% spend 4–7 times a year with others.

³ 61% of the people who responded said that only a few of their relationships got stronger (0–3 relationships).

I. Deep relationships in a church are characterized by love.

In our day, we have easier and quicker ways to connect to people, yet our relationships are often more shallow. *[pause]*

We can quickly message someone on social media, and call someone halfway around the world in an instant.

Yet research indicates that people are still lonely. *[pauseeee]*

What happens is that social media makes it feel like you are connecting with others, yet it's often a shallow and superficial connection.

So in the end, you aren't really connecting on a deep level. *[pauseee]*

Our "friends" on social media aren't truly all friends.

How would your conversation go with some of those people, if you met them in person?

Would they come to be with you, if you needed a shoulder to cry on? *[pauseeee]*

The rampant pervasiveness of automation and "online everything" is making it so that we interact less and less with people, too. *[pause]*

You can shop from your home, and even get groceries delivered without ever seeing another person. *[pause]*

Someday, it may be that we will do most everything without interacting with another human being. *[pauseeee]*

Obviously, there is a certain convenience to this, and in some ways these things can be helpful, yet we must understand what it is doing to our relationships. *[pauseeee]*

We can just text people, consider them friends, and yet never really spend in-person time with them.

And when many families gather together, they are all on their own phones, talking to people who aren't in the room.

But we need deep, in-person connections with others. *[pause]*

We need people that we can cry with, hug, smile at, laugh together with, and put an arm around.

And church is one of the few remaining places where these kinds of relationships can still happen, but the question is: do we actually have close and deep relationships with others here? *[pauseeee]*

Paul had deep, loving relationships—you can't get around that fact.

He greets many, many people in his letter, and his greetings flow out of deep and loving relationships. *[pause]*

In the whole chapter, I counted 16 times that the word “greet” was used for Paul desiring to greet others. *[pause]*

He names 35 individuals, 2 families, and 4 churches...

Talk about a network of relationships! *[pause]*

Apparently, there was this web of relationships with one another, and they couldn't help but greet each other in love. *[pauseeee]*

Just the simple fact of greeting one another shows that they *cared* about each other. *[pause]*

Paul could have just ended the letter with no greetings.

He's the great apostle Paul, and he could have just ended by emphasizing his authority in the Lord, yet he ends with loving greetings...

He cared about them. *[pauseeee]*

Really think about what it communicates when you want to greet another person...

It means that I'm thinking about you, I care about your well-being, you are not invisible to me, you are not unimportant to me.

When you greet another person it's like you are saying, “I want you to feel known, thought of, and cared for.” *[pause]*

And if Paul greeted people this way *in a letter*, just imagine how he greeted people *in person!* *[pause]*

He cared about people.

He wasn't just all about his “to-do list”, but people were on his mind and heart. *[pause]*

He had many things to do and responsibilities and high-up demands, yet he made time to care for people. *[pauseeee]*

Do you greet many people in this church? *[pause]*

Church is not a place to just skirt in and then skirt out.

This is not like going to the movie theater.

No, we are called to have deep, close relationships with others here. *[pause]*

So you should be intentionally greeting and talking to one another, not just making your way to your pew, not talking to anyone, and then back out the door when it's all over. *[pause]*

Imagine if we all did that, there would be no depth to any of our relationships! *[pauseeee]*

This takes intentionality and care.

You have to intentionally walk over to someone. *[pause]*

You have to look at that person and think, "I want to get to know that person."

Or, "I want them to feel known, thought of, and cared for." *[pauseee]*

If you have never walked over to the other side of the sanctuary or any other place other than the few pews where you sit, ask yourself 'why?' *[pause]*

Do you know much about people outside of the few pews around you?

Let's break out of our "pew bubbles" and get to know others! *[pauseeee]*

Why not come into church every week and think, "OK, who haven't I talked to before. I'm going to go talk to them." *[pause]*

When we have fellowship lunches downstairs, why not sit with someone new? *[pause]*

Speaking of the fellowship lunches, if you don't come to fellowship lunches, come out, for those are prime opportunities to deepen your relationships. *[pause]*

We have been doing a lot more fellowship events to aid us in going deeper, but you have to take advantage of them.

So consider why you don't come out to them, and determine to come to the next one. *[pauseeee]*

As we do this, our relationships will start to deepen, for we will begin to get to know more people well. *[pauseeee]*

Paul knew people and cared about people, in fact, he knew people *by name*. *[pause]*

As I mentioned, he named 35 individuals in this chapter...

He made time to get to know people. *[pause]*

Paul was no preacher or leader, who just showed up to preach, and then quickly bolted out the back door.

No, he knew people personally. *[pause]*

This shows us that he spent time with people, and got to know them. *[pause]*

A life of ministry led him to know people, for he cared about people. *[pauseeee]*

Do you know the people here by name? *[pause]*

Let me tell you, this is a small enough church that if you have been here for a good bit of time, then you should know the name of every person here, other than maybe someone new. *[pause]*

Greet people, learn their name, ask them questions, and spend time with them.

We will never go deeper with each other, if we can't do these basic things.

And over time as you do this, your relationships have the potential to deepen. *[pauseeee]*

Now greeting others, and getting to know their name is great.

It's a good start, and the foundation for a deep relationship, but that can't be all that it ever goes with others. *[pause]*

Our relationships must go further than "Hi, how are you?" and deeper than knowing someone's name.

They must be *close*. *[pause]*

Paul greeted people, knew them by name, but that's not all, for he was also close to people. *[pause]*

He calls four different people "beloved".

These people are especially dear to Paul, loved by Paul, and cherished by him.

He had deep affection for them. *[pauseee]*

Paul wasn't guarded, but was willing to show his closeness with others. *[pause]*

He was not some macho man, who couldn't share his emotions.

Rather, he called people "my beloved". *[pause]*

He loved people and was close to them. *[pause]*

Paul could have tried to remain distant and unattached from people, for he wasn't always in one place super long.

But he was willing to get close to people, and did so!

He had close relationships! *[pauseeee]*

Are there people here that you would call 'beloved' or who you would say are very dear to you? *[pause]*

Are you close to people here?

Could you say, “I love that person over there”? *[pausee]*

One thing that we need to change is the way we talk about each other and to each other.

We should be willing to use language that speaks of our closeness.

We should be willing to call each other brother, sister, or things like that. *[pause]*

Often when you talk in terms of closeness, it brings you closer together over time. *[pauseee]*

Speaking of those family terms, Paul speaks using family terms here in this chapter. *[pause]*

In verse 1, he calls Phoebe “our sister”.

In verse 13, he talks about how Rufus’ mother was like a mother to him.

And in verse 14, he speaks about “the brothers”, which refers to a group of Christians. *[pause]*

The church of God is a family.

We are a family. *[pause]*

Most often, we don’t view each other as brothers and sisters, yet we truly are!

We should be close and affectionate with one another as a close family would. *[pauseee]*

How we think about and talk to each other matters! *[pause]*

We need to keep reminding ourselves that we are a church family.

As we look around this room, we should think, “That’s my brother in Christ. That’s my sister in Christ.”

And we should treat each other as family. *[pause]*

One woman even treated Paul like he was her son!

She must have cared for him in such a loving way, for him to say this. *[pause]*

Are our relationships like this?

Are we close like a family?

Do we talk like a family—interact and care for each other like a family?

Do we spend lots of time together like a family? *[pause]*

Our relationships with one another in the church are to be close. *[pause]*

We shouldn't come in here and feel like we are going to a show. *[pause]*

We shouldn't come in here and feel like we are simply co-workers at a job. *[pause]*

We shouldn't come in here and feel distant, detached, or aloof from one another.

No, we should come here and feel like we are gathering with family.

Why else would he say, "Greet one another with a holy kiss"? *[pauseeee]*

The holy kiss was a way to display their kinship in Christ, and it cultivated even more closeness. *[pause]*

Think of how you may hug your family.

It both demonstrates your closeness and cultivates more closeness. *[pause]*

We are brothers and sisters in Christ, meant to show brotherly love to each other.

So since we are a family, Paul wants us to show it in how we interact with each other.

And he points out that a great way to display this love is by giving an affectionate greeting. *[pauseeee]*

Now the question remains: are we supposed to start giving this "holy kiss" to each other starting now? *[pause]*

Well the truth is that in our culture this is not normal, and actually creates awkward, uncomfortable situations, where people don't feel loved. *[pause]*

We are certainly never to throw out the truth behind this verse, but there are some cultural differences. *[pause]*

We must keep the truth of showing affection to each other, but cultures change as to what is normal and appropriate in regards to greetings. *[pause]*

Back then, this holy kiss was normal, now this 'kiss' might put you in a very awkward situation, depending on who you kiss! *[pause]*

So we must think of it this way...

If we were to bridge this 'holy kiss' from their culture to ours, what would be our modern, cultural equivalent?

The closest thing we do today is probably a hug. *[pause]*

We should at the very least do a handshake, a hug would be ideal, and possibly a hand or arm around the shoulder, when appropriate. *[pause]*

The point is simply this: we should show affectionate love towards each other. *[pause]*

Americans in general are already very stand-offish in the first place, yet the church shouldn't be like that.

We should be counter-cultural and show love to one another as a family would. *[pauseeee]*

Let's seek to do this as a church.

Let's show affectionate love towards each other! *[pause]*

Someone new should walk in here, and think, "Wow, this feels like a family." *[pause]*

We are family, so let's act like it, and as we do, it will only grow us closer and closer together in love. *[pauseeee]*

The deepness of these early Christians was also seen in their sacrifice for one another. *[pause]*

In verse 2, we find that Phoebe was "a patron of many and of [Paul] as well". *[pause]*

She willingly helped and aided Paul and many others, so Paul calls on others to "help her in whatever she may need". *[pause]*

Christian relationships are helping relationships.

When one of us needs something, we rally around them and help them.

When one of us is down, we encourage them and strengthen them. *[pause]*

We don't try to go at the Christian life alone, rather, we need each other!

We help, help, and help each other. *[pause]*

I'd love for our church to be continually known as a place that helps others.

A place where we readily step up, sacrifice, and help each other in whatever way they may need.

Now that would bring us together in love! *[pauseeee]*

With this, we also see in verse 6, that a woman named Mary is said to have worked hard for the Romans.

But it even goes further than this, for we discover that Prisca and Aquila risked their necks for Paul's life. *[pause]*

That's loving sacrifice! *[pause]*

Would you "work hard" for others in this room? *[pause]*

Would you “risk your neck” for the life of someone else in this room? *[pause]*

I fear that our relationships are not deep enough, not sacrificial enough, not close enough!

Yet loving, close, and deep relationships say, “I will work hard for you, even if it means sacrificing my comfort, time, and wants.” *[pause]*

Loving, close, and deep relationships say, “I am willing to risk my life for you.” *[pauseeee]*

Paul and the Romans’ relationship shows us that deep relationships are characterized by love. *[pause]*

They are caring, knowing, close, and sacrificial. *[pauseeee]*

So think about the people here in this church, and your relationship to them....

Do you greet them in love and care? *[pause]*

Do you know people’s names? *[pause]*

Do you know them deeply?

Are you close with people here? *[pause]*

Are they like a brother or sister to you? *[pause]*

Do you show that family-love in how you interact with them?

And do you sacrifice for others in this room? *[pause]*

Way too often church-goers think that church is just a shallow thing, where they can come and go and check it off their list.

It just becomes a thing to do on Sunday’s.

But our relationships with others in the church are to be deep. *[pause]*

Your church relationships should be some of the closest and deepest relationships that you have. *[pauseeee]*

So we saw what deep relationships look like in Paul’s relationships with the Romans, but *how* are they possible? *[pause]*

We see in this text that...

II. Deep relationships in a church are possible because of Christ!

If you think about the church, it’s a unique gathering. *[pause]*

The church has people young and old, rich and poor, with differing backgrounds, upbringings, and ethnicities.

So what is it that can bring us together to have such deep relationships? *[pause]*

From an earthly standpoint, our differences should NOT lead us to be together in unity and love.

So what makes this deepness, closeness, and love possible among people such as us?

Christ. *[pause]*

Deep relationships in a church are possible because of Christ.

This truth is spread throughout this whole passage like buckshot. *[pause]*

Now you may be wondering where I see this truth—well it’s everywhere—if you only know what to look for. *[pause]*

In the 16 verses of our passage, I found 12 instances of it! *[pause]*

Notice how many times Paul says the phrase “in the Lord”, “in Christ”, or something similar. *[pause]*

It’s everywhere! *[pause]*

Why would Paul do that?

He’s showing that it’s only because of their relationship to Christ that they can have deep relationships with one another. *[pause]*

Christ is what brought them together. *[pause]*

Under His authority, in His power, and because of His mission—they are together one. *[pauseeee]*

Do you ever think of our gathering that way? *[pause]*

Do you realize that the only reason that we are here together right now, in this place, is because of Jesus? *[pause]*

I’ll tell you this, if it wasn’t for Jesus, I wouldn’t be here right now. *[pause]*

Without Christ, I’d be off living for myself, pursuing my own sinful passions.

But because of the marvelous grace of Jesus, we have been redeemed and brought into one body! *[pause]*

We have been forgiven, given eternal life, and brought into a family together.

We now have a mission, one true Leader, unity, purpose, and can go deeper with one another.
[pause]

We are truly *in Christ and in the Lord*. *[pauseeee]*

We are converts to Christ, who have been chosen in the Lord and approved in Him.

He has made us fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who seek to work hard in the Lord.

We are truly a church of Christ, who welcome and love each other in the Lord. *[pauseee]*

Jesus has brought us together into relationship, and it is our relationship with Him that leads and empowers us to have deep, loving relationships with one another. *[pauseeee]*

If we are going to go deeper, we must look to Christ!

He is the bond that binds us together, and as we look to Him together, our bond strengthens.
[pause]

Just listen to Ephesians 4:15–16...

“Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” *[pauseeee]*

We have the same Lord and Savior and King.

We are all brought into His family, and we have the same mission.

So we help each other as we serve Him. *[pause]*

We work hard with each other for His kingdom and cause.

And we are in this together. *[pauseeee]*

Many American Christians think of their life of faith in only individualistic ways...

They think, “Why do I need someone to preach to me when I can just study the Bible on my own?” *[pause]*

They think, “Why do I need the church?” *[pause]*

They think, “I can do this Christian life on my own!”

But that’s not Biblical Christianity! *[pause]*

There are to be no lone rangers among us, rather, we should view ourselves as a part of something, a part of a community.

And not just any old, earthly community, for we are the body of Christ! *[pause]*

We have been brought together by the precious blood of Christ, for Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins, rose again, and has given the Spirit to all who believe in Him.

And now those who have placed their faith in Him are not only saved and given eternal life, but have been made one with each other. *[pauseeee]*

As we dwell upon what we are *in Christ*, we can't help but be brought together in unity, depth, and love.

So church of God, let's never neglect to think about what Christ has made us. *[pause]*

When you look over and see that other person in the church, and think, "They are a brother or sister in the family of God," how could we *not* go deeper? *[pause]*

When you look over and see that other person, and think, "They are another part of the body in the body of Christ," how could we neglect them? *[pause]*

These things should cause us to love them and want to be closer to them, and go deeper with them. *[pauseeee]*

As we saw this morning...

Because of Christ, our relationships in our church can and should go deeper.

Are your relationships with others in the church deep and close? *[pause]*

If not, remember that they *should* go deeper, for we are brothers and sisters in Christ, working and helping one another in serving the Lord.

This should be a place of loving closeness. *[pause]*

The Lord didn't die for us, and bring us together so that our relationships would forever be 2 inches deep. *[pause]*

He didn't bring us together so that we would just be like acquaintances or just barely friends, if that...

He died and brought us together into the family of God, so that we would be an amazing, counter-cultural, loving, deep, close, and affectionate community that displays His glory for all to see. *[pause]*

Beloved, we are in this together because of Christ, so let's go deeper with one another.