

3: ACCEPTING ONE ANOTHER

Discovering God's Design for Community

Overview

Jesus provides our example of how we should accept one another. Christ accepts us unconditionally, not if we do certain things in a certain way or a certain order, but rather just as we are. The Bible calls us, as a community of believers, to do likewise. We are called to be sensitive toward our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, and greater still, sensitive toward those seeking Christ. But what does Scripture *really* mean when it commands us to “accept one another?” This study explores what it truly means to accept one another and how we might embrace Christ’s example of acceptance as a community.

Objectives

The goal of this session is to:

- To understand the acceptance of Jesus Christ and how this affects how we accept others.
- To embrace the fact that Christians will have differences of opinion on non-essential matters.
- To begin to establish Biblical acceptance as a foundational principle for the group.

Life Story

As a part of the community building process, members of your group will be sharing their Life Story over the next few weeks.¹ Tonight, two more members (or couples) will be sharing their story. Be sure to give them time to share and time for the group to encourage them afterwards.

Leaders Notes

Format for the Evening:

1. Arrival: Eat & Greet (15 min.)
2. Welcome/Icebreaker (20 min.)
3. Life Story (15 min.)
4. Break (5 min.)
5. Study (35 min.)
6. Prayer (10 min.)
7. Wrap-Up (10 min.)
8. Mingle/Visit

To begin, share the Overview, Objectives, and Illustration with the group. These are designed to help introduce the topic and prepare them to study the Scriptures and discuss the issue together.

¹ Please refer to the “Sharing Your Life Story” small group guide resource for an explanation of the process and tips for you and your group. A copy of this guide is included

Opening Illustration

To begin our study, have the group reflect on the following story. While somewhat lengthy, it gives a powerful image of what it looks like to “accept one another.”²

One Sunday afternoon our family gathered around our big oak table for dinner. Soon my daughter Kate’s laughter rose above the talk. “Gram, you’re silly!” she said. We all turned to see my mom delicately lifting to her mouth a small strand of peas on the blade of her knife. All but one pea made it, and everyone clapped. Then Mom told us the story behind her unorthodox technique:

“When I was little we didn’t have much. It was the Depression. But we did have a table full of food because my father grew wonderful vegetables. Lots of hoboes who had jumped from the train wandered onto our property, looking for a meal. More often than not an extra seat was pulled up to our dinner table.

“One summer afternoon I was sweeping the kitchen floor when my father’s voice came through the screen door: ‘Lizzy, set another plate. We have company tonight.’ Our guest paused in the doorway, and dipped his head in a gesture of gratitude. ‘Looks like he doesn’t speak much English,’ Dad said, ‘but he’s hungry like we are. His name is Henry.’

“When dinner was ready Henry stood until we were all seated, then gently perched on the edge of his chair, his head bowed and his hat in his lap. The blessing was said and dishes were passed from hand to hand.

“We all waited, as was proper, for our guest to take the first bite. Henry must have been so hungry he didn’t notice us watching him as he grabbed his knife. Carefully he slid the blade into the pile of peas before him, and then lifted a quivering row to his mouth without spilling a single pea. He was eating with his knife! I looked at my sister May and we covered our mouths to muffle our snickers. Henry took another knife, and then another.

“My father, taking note of the glances we were exchanging, firmly set down his fork. He looked me in the eye, then took his knife and thrust it into the peas on his plate. Most of them fell off as he attempted to lift them to his mouth, but he continued until all the peas were gone.

“Dad never did use his fork that evening, because Henry didn’t. It was one of my father’s silent lessons in acceptance. He understood the need for this man to maintain his dignity, to feel comfortable in a strange place with people of different customs. Even at my young age I understood the greatness of my father’s simple act of brotherhood.

“Mom paused, looked at her grandchildren, and winked as she plowed her knife into a mountain of peas.”

with this study. With it you will be able to explain the exercise to your group and provide them with tools to help them share their story.

² You may want to consider having someone in the group read the story. Often times a new face and new voice helps focus attention. Perhaps there is a gifted story teller in your group that would be willing to read it for the group. Just remember, you may want to give them a few minutes to look it over at the beginning of the night as this will help familiarize them with the story and enable them to read it better.

-- Contributed by Cori Connors to *Guideposts*, March 1997, p. 36

Questions and Reflections:³

In this story we, like the family at the table, have no idea who this guest was. We have no insight into his life, his past, or his beliefs. We just know he was hungry.

- ? What does this story communicate about acceptance?
- ? Why do we find it easier to accept people who are like us versus those we have very little in common with, or those who may do things differently?

Searching the Scriptures

As we think about our purpose as a LifeGroup community and our goal to impact the world around us, it is important to understand what the Scriptures teach about acceptance. What guidance does God give us about how to “accept one another?”

(Have someone in the group read the following passage out loud. Discuss it based on the questions below.⁴)

Romans 14:1-3⁵

Now **accept the one** who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, **for God has accepted him.**

- ? What does this text teach us about the role our personal opinions play in accepting one another?
- ? What should the basis for our acceptance of one another be?
- ? All followers of Christ are at different levels of maturity. Should a weaker brother be accepted into the group with the understanding that you will change his opinion about certain issues? Why or why not?
- ? What are some examples of “disputable issues” in which believers may hold differing opinions? How do we typically respond to these?⁶

³“Don’t be afraid of silence when asking a question. Sometimes it can take a few minutes for people to form their thoughts or get up the nerve to share them, but once an opinion has been shared, others will quickly chime in. Give the group time to soak in the case study and the question before moving on.

⁴When studying a passage together it is often very helpful to let the group discuss the passage openly before jumping into the discussion questions. Try asking them:

What strikes you about this passage?

What words, actions, or commands hit you in reading this?

These kinds of questions often open up incredible discussion on the Word of God.

⁵Please read Romans 14-15:13 ahead of time to gain perspective on the context in which Paul is calling believers to accept one another. The reason that some believers were vegetarians may have been the avoidance of meat offered to idols. The point is that there was a difference of opinion concerning an issue which many in the church were using as basis for excluding one another. You may want to consider “modernizing” the passage by reading it again, but exchanging wine and water for the meat and vegetables. How does your opinion on drinking affect your acceptance of another believer or un-believer?

⁶Allow various points of view

Have someone else in the group read the next passage:

Romans 15:5-7

“Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus; that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore, **accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us** to the glory of God.”

- ? We are called to accept one another just as Christ also accepted us. How has Christ accepted us? What did he do that communicated his acceptance? (Think through some of his interaction with various people during his ministry. How did he show acceptance to Zaccheus? Tax collectors? The sick?)
- ? In light of the discussion from the previous question, do we tend to accept others as Christ has accepted us? Why or why not?
- ? In what ways can our group accept one another in spite of our different levels of maturity and our differences of opinion? What does acceptance look like for us as a group?

Finishing Out

As we discussed in the first lesson on “Community,” walking into a new group can be intimidating to many people. What will they think of me? Will they really like me for who I am – will they be able to look past what I’ve done?

Feeling accepted is an essential part of the process of life change. If we don’t feel accepted, we will never feel open enough to share our lives and grow together. If we don’t make others feel accepted, then we lose an opportunity to share Christ’s acceptance with them. If we truly believe that Christ has accepted us, we have to model that acceptance with others!

*“Accept one another just as
Christ also accepted you.”*

to be presented. However, keep the discussion brief and do not allow it to fall into a debate on that particular issue. You may want to conclude discussion with, “As you can see, we certainly have differing opinions on these various issues...” and transition on to the next question.

Sermon-Based Studies exist to help you lead your LifeGroup into spiritual maturity through discussion and the practical application of truth. You, as a LifeGroup leader, know your group best. Feel free to add to or alter this study based on the needs and maturity of your individual group.

For comments or questions concerning Sermon-Based Studies please contact Drew Leaver, Pastor of Spiritual Growth, at dleaver@chaseoaks.org.