PRACTICING A ONE ANOTHER CULTURE
Small Group Discussion Guide

Sermon Title: Open Embrace in Spite of Difference
Date preached: October 4, 2026

Opening prayer: Our God, we pray that we may enter together into fellowship with you – Father, Son and Spirit – and as we experience fellowship with you, may we also develop fellowship with one another so that we might reflect the love and care that brings you honor and us joy. Amen

Opening question: Were you able to practice Koinonia fellowship this past week? If so, please share that experience with your group.

Sermon Focus: The apostle Paul invites believers to welcome and accept others into their fellowship without an agenda or preconditions. Jesus died for all humanity, not just for those who agree with us or are like us. To live as the body of Christ, we need to learn to welcome those who are unlike us into our lives. We cannot let our hurts or expectations shape or drive our relationships. When we submit these to God for healing and refinement, our welcome can move from casual reception to open embrace.

Sermon Question:

What part of the sermon has stayed with you since Sunday?
OR What challenged, encouraged, or surprised you in the sermon?

Scripture reading: Romans 15:7 and 1 Peter 4:9
Optional expanded reading: Romans 15:1-13; I Peter 4:1-11; I Corinthians 12:12-27

Scripture Context: The Apostle Paul's description of the life of believers who 'offer your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and pleasing to God' (Rom 12:1-2) continues as Paul focuses in Chapter 15 on the characteristics of the body of believers. Earlier he instructed individuals to serve one another humbly (12:3-8) and to live peaceably with others (12:9-18). Now he focuses on the internal dynamics of the church in Rome, which was struggling to accept Jewish believers who had been exiled from the city when the church was formed.

Chapter 14 addresses these differences, beginning with the words "Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions" (14:1). Paul pictures a community where both the strong and the weak in faith can thrive. He urges the strong to build up the weak, not by judging them but by giving up any action that would place a stumbling block in their path and hinder their growth toward maturity. In this community, the mature do not lord it over the weak or spend their energy justifying themselves in arguments over opinions. Instead, they welcome (literally, take by the hand and bring in) the weak into the full life of the community with sincere love, even those who have wronged them in the past and may still disagree with them.

To cement his point, Paul turns to the Old Testament, quoting 2 Samuel 22:50, Psalm 18:49, Deuteronomy 32:43, and other passages to show that a reconciled community of Jews and Gentiles was God's plan from the start. God called Abraham's descendants to be set apart so that they would be an attractive example of the blessings of belonging to God, drawing the nations toward God rather than keeping them away. Now the body of Christ is God's new example to unbelievers – one that is known for its love and grace not its judgmental homogeneity driving away all who do not conform.

Word in focus: Proslambano (Gk: προσλαμβάνω) – (Prohs-lam-BAN-o).
To welcome or embrace; To take or receive into one's home with the collateral idea of kindness; To take as one's companion; To grant one access to one's heart.

This compound word combines the prefix PROS (πρός), meaning "toward" with the verb LAMBANO (λαμβάνω), "to take or receive." In the middle voice used here, the word carries the sense of taking someone to oneself, that is, accepting them into friendship or hospitality.

Romans 15:7 uses two forms of this verb. Believers are urged to welcome one another (προσλαμβάνεσθε, present imperative) just as Christ welcomed them (προσελάβετο, aorist). The aorist points to Christ's decisive act of welcome, which is the basis for our welcome of others. The present imperative calls us to keep practicing that welcome. Together, the verse could be paraphrased: "Wholeheartedly welcome one another into your fellowship, in the same way Christ has welcomed you."

Questions:

1. Romans 15:7 tells us to "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you." How did Christ accept you? What condition were you in?
2. What is the difference between accepting someone in love and agreeing with everything that person believes? How can embracing someone that you don't agree with be done?
3. What good results come from accepting one another according to Romans 15:5-9?
4. Read 1 Peter 4:7-12. What is your definition of showing hospitality? How might your definition limit what you can and will do? How are the gifts that God has given you useful in an expanded view of showing hospitality?
5. How can hospitality give us the space to know more about each other beyond our differences?
6. What should we do as a church body to embrace each other despite our differences? How can we encourage each other to use our gifts of hospitality and welcome?

Sharing life together: What is one thing you could do this week to welcome someone?

Closing prayer: Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.