

Romans 16:1-16

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Date: 11 September 2016

Preacher: Jonathan Gemmell

[0 : 01] Well, good evening. Lovely to see you. We're in Romans chapter 16, verses 1 to 16.

But I thought we might start with a bit of a quiz. I'm going to read out a list of names, and I want you to tell me what holds them all together. There is massive prizes if you get them right, such as the confidence I have in the obscurity of the list.

First group, Carolyn Knot, Jose Perez, Jeremy Woodhead, Rick Findlater, Janine Schneider, Deborah East, Lenore Stewart, Vivian McGillicuddy.

Does anyone know who they are? No? They were the makeup artists on Lord of the Rings, The Twin Towers. What about this group?

John Kavanagh, Joe Firth, Jodie Grinner, Mickey Hall, Nathan McQueen, Tanya Nadaraja, David Phillips, Jess Stretton, John Stubbs, John Walker, and Vicky Jenkins.

[1 : 06] Who are these people? They are the Paralympics GB archery team. Last group. Alana Kirby, Gareth Hill, Simon Holmes, Catherine McClintock, Dora Makeley, Alison Scott, Dawn Walker, and Louise Wright.

Any ideas? Huge prizes. They are the radiography department at Queen Margaret University. And you're all sitting there thinking, who cares?

I'm also secretly delighted that none of you got it. Just long lists of names, no real relevance. What are they to me?

Why should I care? That is what we're going to face when we come into Romans chapter 16. It seems that I have got the job today of reading out lists of names.

Because Romans 16, 1 to 16 is just a long list of names. It is Paul coming into land for his great letter of Romans, listing a load of people who he wants to greet.

[2 : 22] John Chrysostom. John Chrysostom. That's hard to say without your teeth in. The 4th century church father writes this about this passage. I think that many, even of those who have the appearance of being extremely good men, hasten over this part of the epistle as superfluous and having no great weight at all.

John Chrysostom doesn't think this passage of scripture is particularly worth studying. But I want to show you that it really is. Actually, if we can get in behind and grasp and see the panorama of what Paul is displaying about the church in Rome, then I think it will capture us, it will inspire us, and it will send us out transformed.

This is a tremendously instructive and encouraging passage of scripture. I like to have a little cheeky look at other church websites.

And one of the things I love to see on a church website is a photo of the church. See, what kind of people go to a church such as that?

I think Romans 16, in many ways, is like a photograph of the church. Unfortunately, digital photography wasn't around in the first century. It's like a photo of the church giving us a snapshot of what the church in Rome looks like.

[3 : 47] It's almost like if you went to Rome Evangelical Church, this would be the picture that was on the homepage. And I think as we get into it, we'll see that it's the kind of church that we would love to go to.

So let me read again. Some of the names are quite difficult, so I'll just say them with confidence. We'll all agree that is how you're actually supposed to pronounce them. Romans 16, verse 1. I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Sancria.

I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you. For she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.

Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I, but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house.

Greet my dear friend Eponatus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia. Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me.

[4 : 53] They are outstanding among the apostles. And they were in Christ before I was. Greet Ampliatus, my dear friend in the Lord. Greet Abanus, our fellow worker in Christ.

And my dear friend Stachys. Greet Apollas, whose fidelity to Christ has stood the test. Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus. Greet Herodian, my fellow Jew.

Greet those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord. Greet Dryphena and Dryphosa. I like to think they're twins. Those women who work hard in the Lord. Greet my dear friend Parsis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord.

Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother. He has been a mother to me too. Greet Asyncretus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the other brothers and sisters with them. Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas, and all the Lord's people who are with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

[5 : 54] That all the churches of Christ send greetings. That is our passage for this evening. And I think at the outset it is worth reminding us why Paul writes the letter to the Romans.

And I think there's three and a half reasons. The first reason is this, that Paul is near the end of his ministry. He's writing from Corinth. And it is his chance to write a summary, a doctrinal summary of the timeless gospel.

That Romans is about the Lord Jesus. Who he is, what he's done, and what it means to follow him. What the church looks like. Some rich and deep theology. So Paul at the end of his ministry writes it down for the Roman church.

It's a doctrinal summary. I think secondly it heals church unity. There has been a massive division in the Roman church.

It all started in 49 AD with the Emperor Claudius who expelled all the Jews from Rome. Up until that point, most of the positions of authority in the church were taken by the Jews.

[7 : 04] Obviously they had the schooling in the Old Testament. They knew more and therefore rose to the surface of the early church in Rome. With Claudius' expulsion of the Jews, obviously there's a huge vacuum filled.

A huge vacuum left which is then filled by Gentiles as they grow in knowledge and truth. And are transformed by the Holy Spirit. Five years after 49 AD, which for those that are good at maths is 54 AD, Claudius dies.

And with his death, the exile of the Jews, the edict is rescinded. So now the Jews start coming back to Rome. One group, one couple we know who did this was Priscilla and Aquila.

They left Rome. Paul meets them in Corinth. And now we find them back some years later. Well, you can see there's going to be a bit of a power struggle. That as the Jewish Christians come back, they find that their seats have been filled by the Gentile Christians.

And suddenly there's a little bit of friction. And church meetings are a lot more exciting than they were during those five years where the Jews were away. So there is a real thing in it about healing the unity between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians.

[8 : 17] I think that is explicit in the letter, particularly when you see what Paul writes in chapter 7, 8 and 9 about how the Gentiles are included. Thirdly, and I alluded to it last week, that Paul writes the letter to the Romans to try and garner their support for his pioneer mission trip to Spain.

Just look back with me at chapter 15, verse 24. I plan to do so. That's visit the church in Rome. When I go to Spain, I hope to see you while passing through and that you will assist me on my journey there.

After I have enjoyed your company for a while. He's about to go to a new frontier. He's about to preach what he wanted to preach the gospel where Christ was not known.

And he wants the Roman church's help to fund and to enable that ministry. There's the first three. And I think this is like half a reason tagged on at the end.

I've called it number four, but that's more in hope than in faith. It is also to commend Phoebe. That's how chapter 16 starts. That Phoebe is a woman from Senecraia.

[9 : 27] That is a suburb, actually the port suburb just outside Corinth. And it seems that Phoebe is doing a geographical and perhaps for a period or perhaps for a long term move is moving from Corinth to Rome.

And it seems that Phoebe's problem is that she doesn't really know anyone in Rome. And she needs somebody to vouch for her. Now, letters of commendation are quite common in this culture. And so, Paul writes Phoebe a letter of commendation.

And at the front he puts 15 chapters of rich doctrine. It seems that Phoebe is probably the courier of the letter. That she's going to deliver it.

Now, that makes a lot of sense. Because men lose things and women have handbags. That would be slightly embarrassing, wouldn't it, if you turned up to Rome and went, oh, I've got something for you. Oh, I might have left it on the camel.

And so that gives us the background to the letter. And rather than have 26 subpoints about all the different people and go through them exhaustively in some kind of almanac, I just want to give you three big points that I think are really encouraging from this letter.

[10 : 37] The first one is this, that there is a rich tapestry of people in the church in Rome. First century names are not just arbitrarily given. Parents don't sit in the maternity ward flicking through a list of baby names and choosing Alpheus just out of hand.

They mean something. And therefore, if we do a bit of digging around the name, we can find out quite a lot about the social status, the gender, and the occupation of the person being mentioned.

In Romans 16, there are 26 people, 8 women, 18 men, 17 are slaves, 1's a freed slave, and there are 8 free people. There are 3 Jews, 13 Greeks, and 12 Roman names.

There are potentially 5 house churches mentioned, possibly 3 house churches mentioned, definitely 1 house church mentioned. The house church that is definitely mentioned is Priscilla and Aquila.

Now it makes sense because Aquila we know is a tent maker. If you're a tent maker, you need a big workshop to stretch out the canvas. That would be a great place for Rome Evangelical Church to meet. Because there is room for everyone you can turn.

[11 : 43] The music up loud, and the neighbours won't care. There are some people who are quite famous, like Priscilla and Aquila. There are some people who we know nothing else about except what Paul writes about them in these bits.

Some of them are quite interesting. There's one or two that are a little bit controversial. So, for example, Junior in verse 7 causes a lot of commentators to spill a lot of ink, principally because we don't know whether Junior is a he or a she.

It could be a shortening of a long Roman name, or it could be just the name of a female. I like to think that it's the name of a female, and she happens to be Andronicus' wife.

That seems to make sense on the reading. The second person that is interesting is Phoebe. Phoebe is the female equivalent of the god Apollos.

She tends to keep that name. She's described as a deacon. That causes some people controversy. Does she have like an Acts chapter 6 kind of role in the church? Is that even open to females?

[12 : 50] She's also described as a benefactor the word Patronus, meaning someone who has been invaluablely helpful. It seems that Phoebe is a woman of means.

You know, you go to her house for dinner, and you've got knives and forks taking up the whole side. She is quite posh. But rather than stockpile her money, it seems that she is a rich benefactor.

She is somebody who has sponsored and supported gospel work, and particularly Paul. They seem to have worked closely together. And Paul describes her as a Patronus.

Phoebe has been invaluablely helpful to me. Second thing that potentially causes problems is back with our friends Andronicus and Junia.

Look at the second half of verse 7. They are outstanding among the apostles. That's caused some people to freak out. Are these people apostles?

[13 : 48] It could be equally translated, they are outstanding among the apostles, or that they are highly esteemed by the apostles. There's no problem if they were highly esteemed by the apostles.

Lots of people were highly esteemed by the apostles, I'm sure. Lots of people have hung a lot of weight on this when it comes to women in leadership. Was Andronicus and Junia, were they apostles in the way that Paul and Peter and James and John were apostles?

Well, I don't think we necessarily need to conclude that. Because in the New Testament, other people are called apostles. In 2 Corinthians 8, Titus is called an apostle.

In Philippians 2, Epaphroditus is called an apostle. Literally meaning an accredited messenger. Somebody who comes with a message from the apostles. The New Testament also describes other people as apostles.

So in Acts 13, Barnabas is called an apostle. Somebody who is almost fulfilling the role of a commissioned missionary. If we use the apostle in either of those ways, we have no problem saying Andronicus and Junia were missionaries.

[15:02] See as well, they were in Christ before Paul. Could it be that the first pioneer missionaries to the people of Rome were Andronicus and Junia commissioned?

To take the unstoppable message of Jesus Christ to these people. Another person who is quite interesting is verse 13 with Rufus. There's only one other Rufus mentioned in the Bible.

And that is the two sons of Simon of Cyrene in Mark 13. Simon of Cyrene has two sons. One's called Alexander and one's called Rufus.

Lots of people think this is the same person. Mark writes his gospel with a particularly Roman audience in mind. And therefore, by mentioning Rufus here, it would really strike a chord because perhaps Rufus has often told the story about his dad just passing through from the country, who happened to be told by the Roman soldiers to help Jesus of Nazareth carry his cross.

If that is the case, then see that Simon of Cyrene's wife, who is Rufus's mother, is also a mother to the apostle Paul. It's quite a nice little package right there.

[16:16] Lastly, as we just mentioned some names, Aristopoulos is potentially the grandson of Herod the Great, who settles in Rome. He would have taken with him a large number of Jewish servants and slaves.

And therefore, that would be very conducive ground for the gospel to take root and bear fruit.

Narcissus was a prominent free man. Let me just find Narcissus.

He is in verse 11. He's a very prominent freed man. We read a lot about him in Roman literature.

He was never a Christian, but he was very sympathetic to their cause.

And therefore, it seems that perhaps the household of Narcissus was like a safe haven for Christians going forward. These may be loose ends that you don't particularly care about.

But I think they're interesting. But I think, actually, the massive encouragement of this chapter is not the individual names, but it is all the names together.

[17:13] Paul is writing to a church, a place he's never visited. When he starts Romans, in chapter 1, verse 16, he says, The gospel is the power of God for everyone who believes.

If you wanted a personification of what power looked like at this time, it would be Rome. It would be the Roman army. It would be the Roman organization.

In fact, in Romans 13, 1, Paul has written, Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities. If you've got a KJV, it will say everybody be subject to the higher powers or the powers that be.

Rome is synonymous with power. And yet we see here, right in the very HQ of what power looks like, we see that the gospel is more powerful.

That right behind enemy lines, the gospel has taken root and is bearing fruits. That actually, if you're a bit, if you have a few approximations about how big a household is and how many brothers and sisters that could be, I reckon you could say there was about 100 people listed here.

[18:25] And so right in the, there's a real church, a real church in Rome, a real church planted behind enemy lines.

Because Rome may be powerful, but the gospel is all powerful. It is unstoppable. Paul will finish the act saying that the gospel spreads unhinderedly.

And even the persecution, even the, the, the constraint there is on these Roman Christians, even when it comes to swearing allegiance to the emperor and they say, no, Jesus is Lord.

The gospel works. And there is a real church. The gospel is power. And if you want to see an example of that working, these people who, where it is really tough, where it is really difficult, where it really costs, Paul says, greet them because they're my brothers and sisters.

Greet that church because it is a real church. It's a real church that Jesus is building, that he died for, and that he will complete. The gospel is power.

[19:37] And Paul says that at the beginning, and he shows that at the end. Milton Vince writes this. Outside of heaven, the power of God in its highest density is found inside the gospel.

This must be so, for the Bible twice describes the gospel as the power of God. Nothing else in all of scripture is ever described in this way, except the person of Jesus Christ.

Such a description indicates that the gospel is not only powerful, but that it is the ultimate entity in which God's power resides and does its greatest work.

Indeed, God's power is seen in erupting volcanoes in the unimaginably hot boil of our massive sun, and in the lightning speed of a recently discovered star seen streaking through the heavens at 1.5 million miles per hour.

Yet in scripture, such wonders are never labeled the power of God. How powerful then must the gospel be that it would merit such a title? And how great is the salvation it accomplishes in people's lives?

[20 : 43] And Romans 16 is evidence of that. This list of seeming irrelevant names is a wonderful illustration of just how powerful the gospel is.

Right here in the HQ of all that is anti-Jesus is a real church. And it's growing everywhere. Among slaves and high officials.

It's uniting people who would have absolutely nothing else to do with each other. Because the gospel is so powerful that it humbles everyone under grace.

So that if you're a Phoebe who's a highfalutin businesswoman, you'll turn up at Rome and you'll be greeted by a syncretus who's a humble slave.

And the only reason they're together is the gospel. But the gospel is powerful enough to keep them together. In order that a syncretus might call Phoebe my sister.

[21 : 43] And that Phoebe might call a syncretus my brother. It's a wonderful picture of the gospel. And how it works. 150 years later, the church father Tertullian writing about this church in Rome.

A century and a half down the line. And his power writes this. We, talking about Christians, are but of yesterday. Yet we have filled every place among you.

Cities, islands, fortresses, towns, marketplaces. The very camp you live in. Tribes, companies, palaces, senates and forums. We have left you nothing except the temples of your gods.

Such is the power of the gospel to penetrate and infect the population in Rome. A reminder we desperately need today. Because we're all sitting here thinking Edinburgh is pretty toxic to the gospel.

People are pretty hostile. And yet it worked in Rome. And people went to the Colosseum in Rome. And it still worked. So I think we can have great hope.

[22 : 48] Not in our ability. Not in what we can do. But in the truth that the gospel really is the power of God for everyone who believes. And the testimony is seen here tonight.

Because there's a pretty great diversity of people here. And the only reason we can call each other brother and sister is because of the Lord Jesus. And the work that the gospel has done in our lives. First thing we see in Romans 16 is a rich tapestry of people. The second thing is a wide variety of gifts. Paul describes these people in eight different ways.

The only thing we know about most of these people is what Paul writes about them here. How they're commended. And the only thing we see is some of the traits that we are to exhibit if this church is to flourish like that church.

And people would look at the panorama of this church and say that's amazing. That is a supernatural community. That is a really closely knitted family.

[23 : 52] The first one is this and you can see it everywhere. Is that there is real affection and care in this church. See Phoebe described as a sister.

See Rufus' mother described in family terms. See verse 14. All the brothers and sisters. See also. Four times in 5b and 8 and 9 and 12b.

Paul writes my dear friend which is literally the word beloved. See how he feels about these people. These people have a deep and sincere love for each other.

The love they have for each other is tangible. The love that Jesus commands his people to have for one another as a hallmark of their discipleship seems to be very much on show in the church in Rome.

Church is a place of family. A place of affection and care. A fountain of love flowing from Jesus and now into community. Seems to be everywhere in this list.

[24 : 57] It's a place where everybody goes out of their way to love each other. To show affection. To be family together. And we're all very familiar aren't we with the commands to love.

We're all very good at saying we should love one another. But as I was thinking about this week. I was thinking how easy am I to be loved?

How easy do I make myself lovable? Is it easy for people to love me? Am I available enough? Am I humble enough?

Do I need to trust God more in order that when we interact I'm not so highly strung and stressed out? Am I liable to be so thin-skinned and take offense at everything that people just take a really wide berth around me?

Am I so preoccupied with other things that I'm just not accessible? And though I may be listening I'm not really hearing what you're saying. Because I think if we're to be a church that exhibits love for one another.

[26 : 10] We're to go out of our way to love. But we're to be praying to the Lord that we might be easy to love. And I thought this week I'm not actually that easy to love. And so that's been my prayer over the last few days.

And going on that we would be a place that was both loving but easy to love. I think we all need to cultivate this love within our church. And I think many of us, myself especially, need to have a long hard look.

And persistently pray to God, how can I make it easier for others to love me? Paul says one of the hallmarks of this church is love and affection and care.

The second thing we see is that they're workers. Five times Paul commends seven people for their hard work. Five of the seeming hard workers are women.

Paul seems to be saying that gospel work is hard work. This is not let go and let God. This is roll up your sleeves and get involved. Paul uses endless phrases like toil and wrestling and struggle to describe what gospel work is like.

[27 : 19] And it seems that in the church of Rome, there are some people that exhibit what it is to work hard. And people like Mary, verse 6, who work very hard. They are fully involved.

Paul has used in Romans lots of pictures for what gospel work looks like. Athletics. If you watch the Paralympics, it's hard work. Wrestling. Being a soldier.

These people are commended in the eternal words of God for working hard. Being really diligent.

So you look at people like Priscilla and Aquila in verse 3 who have a long and rich history with Paul. And they describe my fellow workers. Now if Paul was doing gospel ministry from my house, this is what I would think. I think you're the Apostle Paul.

I'll just get out of your way and let you get on with it. Just ring your bell if you'd like a cup of tea. Or some more ink for your pen. That would be so easy, wouldn't it? You're the Apostle Paul.

[28 : 27] I'll step back so you can do your thing. And yet they're described as my fellow workers. They were involved. Paul worked hard.

They worked hard. Paul worked hard. Mary worked hard. Hard work. Gospel ministry.

Gospel work. Church is a team sport. It isn't a few working on behalf of the many. It is everyone mucking in that we too might be described by God as those that worked hard.

Those that worked very hard. Those that were fellow workers with each other and God himself. On mission with him. Would Paul describe you in glowing terms like Persis?

Who I've lost. Greet my dear friend Persis. Another woman who has worked very hard. In the Lord. These were hard working people.

[29 : 29] Third trait. They were sacrificial. See that some people are commended for their sacrificial partnership with Paul. See how Priscilla and Aquila verse 4 risked their lives for Paul.

Perhaps during the riot in Corinth. See how Andronicus and Junia were prepared to go to prison with Paul.

There is sacrificial association in these people with gospel suffering. They're in this together. They are for and with one another.

This is surely the living embodiment of what Paul teaches in back in chapter 12. That the church is to mourn with those who mourn and rejoice with those who rejoice. I'm sure if his hand wasn't sore he would have said go to prison with those who are in prison.

Suffer with those that are suffering. Do everything you can. Associate with people in lowly positions. There is no such phrase in the Christian community.

[30 : 32] Well you've made your bed now lie in it. We are all in this together. There needs to be a sacrificial servant hearted commitment at the core of Christian community.

That it really does work when every part of the body is doing its bit. That everyone might grow up powerful and strong in the Lord.

When everyone isn't looking to their own interests. But to the interests of others. Look at Phoebe. She could have had a wonderful life.

She could have owned a Greek island. She could have swanned around. She could have been a morningside lady who lunches every day. But she wasn't.

How did she use her money to sponsor and support gospel ministry? She was sacrificial in the way that she gave. Lastly on this.

[31 : 29] They persevered. What encourages me also about this passage is that there are some people who are marked because they just kept going. Look at verse 7.

Our old friends Andronicus and Junior. They are outstanding among the apostles and they were in Christ before I was. That's a wonderful thing. That Paul can look at those people and say you've been on this road longer than I have and you keep going.

That must be an encouragement when it's tough. Look at Eponatus. Verse 5b. Greet my dear friend Eponatus.

He was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia. Just think when Paul thinks this is really difficult doing pioneer mission.

And he thinks back to his pioneer mission in Asia. And the first face in his mind is Eponatus. The first convert.

[32 : 27] There's something about a first convert. Which is like God's seal of approval that you're not wasting your time. Adoniram Judson in Burma. Right waxes lyrical about his first convert that comes after 15 years.

But it seems to be God saying no. This is working. Look at Apollace. Greet Apollace whose fidelity to Christ has stood the test.

He's been tested. He's had to suffer and yet he's come up saying no I love Jesus. It is a massive encouragement to see people persevering through anything and everything.

It is a massive encouragement for me as a relatively young person to see people keeping going.

People who no matter what will, no matter what happens will not turn away or give up on Jesus.

I remember and there's some students here walking into Aberdeen CU that first Friday night having seen some eye-opening things during Freshers Week. And thinking it is very difficult to be a Christian on campus.

[33 : 35] But as I walked into that CU meeting being met by some fourth years. Who were a lot further down the line ready to be shot at the cannon into the real world.

And I'd gone all the way through still loving and living for Jesus. What an encouragement. Because I thought it might just be possible. It might just be possible to love and serve Jesus even amidst this. Even in Aberdeen. There's a wide variety of gifts displayed. And all of them we should emulate in our lives about being loving. Persevering.

Being sacrificial. Being those who are for one another and in it together. And then lastly and incredibly quickly.

A single source of unity. A rich tapestry of people. A wide variety of gifts. But one single source of unity. It would be very easy to leave today thinking I just need to work harder.

[34 : 40] I just need to text more people and phone more people and have more people around for dinner. And visit more people in hospital. And I need to pull my socks up and work harder. And yet that would be to miss what is at the very core of this passage.

There is a little phrase so easily to overlook that is all over this passage. A little phrase that without it this will be impossible.

And we'll just exhaust ourselves and fail in the attempt. Look at verse 2. I ask you to receive her. That's Phoebe. In the Lord.

Look at verse 3. In Christ. Jesus. Verse 7. In Christ.

Verse 8. In the Lord. Verse 9. In Christ. Verse 10. Fidelity to Christ.

[35 : 44] Verse 11. In the Lord. Verse 12. In the Lord. In the Lord. Verse 13. In the Lord. Verse 15. In the Lord. Why does church work?

It's not about the giftedness of the members first and foremost. It's not about the organization. It's not about the warm fuzzies we can muster from inside ourselves. The reason it works is because of the Lord Jesus who stands right at the center of it and his head over it.

Who will ensure that it works. Who will ensure that the work he started is seen to completion. Who will ensure that the church is the gospel made tangible and visible to the outside world.

The reason that church will work. The reason that church can look like this is because the Lord Jesus unites it, empowers it, works in it and transforms diverse people into real family. It stems from him. It flows from him. And it brings him glory. If we are going to be a church like this. [36 : 51] Then what we each need to do first and foremost is to love the Lord Jesus most. It's to love him. To walk with him. To listen to him.

To be obedient to him. And this will be the symptoms of that. This is the fruit that that will bear. But don't try and do it without getting close to Jesus.

It will fail. Everybody wants to be a community like this. But if it's not built on the Lord Jesus it will fail. It will crash and burn.

Therefore going on from here what do I need to do first and foremost? I need to love Jesus. I need to make sure that all of my life is in him. And as I get closer to him I suddenly find that people really are that difficult.

That he gives me grace. He gives me love. He works in me the miracle that shows me that it is better and more blessed to give than to receive.

[37 : 55] And therefore church works. And Jesus wins. Two little things before we leave which were just kind of afterthoughts that wouldn't fit into my headings. I thought to myself how can Paul write so glowingly about 26 people that he maybe hasn't met?

I can't even remember 26 names of people that I actually know. How can he speak so glowingly about them? And I think it's this that he's been praying for them.

He's been praying for them persistently. That he's been reading Apollet's testimony about how Jesus saw him through a time of testing. That he's been praying for Priscilla and Aquila as they leave Corinth and take up residence in Rome.

He's heard about these wonderful twins, Tryphena and Tryphosa, and how they're a dynamic duo who work hard. And that as he's prayed for them, suddenly his heart is enlarged with love for them. And suddenly he finds himself united to them in a very real and tangible way. That as he's prayed for them and giving thanks for them, his heart has grown in love for them.

[39 : 08] And I wonder if that's not something we should do as well. That I don't think, first and foremost, the way we're going to deepen fellowship at Brunfield is by sitting across a coffee table from one another and talking small talk until we have to go to our next meeting.

I think one of the ways that unity and fellowship and this deep sacrificial love will first and foremost be cultivated in our lives is when we join our hearts in praying for one another and join our hearts in praying with one another.

That I think, and it may be a bit of a stretch from this passage, that prayer strengthens fellowship more than anything else. And secondly, because I know some people are going to ask me at the door, verse 16, greet one another with a holy kiss.

I remember doing a Bible study about 17, and it was the end of 1 Peter, and I asked our youth leader, what's the difference between a holy kiss and a normal kiss?

And my youth leader said about two seconds. If you go to an Eastern Orthodox church, they'll stop the service and you will kiss one another, just to warn you.

[40 : 20] There's a lot of cultural context behind this. People would kiss each other as a greeting just in the normal world. They still do in Lebanon. That was quite hard to get used to when you were just walking around the supermarket and someone ran up to you who you would know.

And they were a six foot five man with a huge beard. It's his usual practice. I love J.B. Phillips. In his translation, he is so English.

He writes chapter 16, verse 16, greet one another with a hearty handshake all round. For my sake. I think we could apply this.

Just be friendly. Be warm. Be open. Make an effort both with brand new people and people that you know. Be warm.

Cross the room. Approach them. Greet them with a hearty handshake if you like. Greet them with a two-handed handshake, even if you don't feel like puckering up at that particular moment.

[41 : 22] Be friendly. Be warm. Be interested. Be open. Romans 16 is a wonderful anatomy of a supernatural community called church.

A place where a rich tapestry of people are woven together. A place a whole bunch of different gifts are displayed and used for the benefit and blessing of others.

And a place that finds all of its source, all of its hope, all of its power, and all of its ability in and through the Lord Jesus. Jesus who makes it all possible and profitable and glorifying.

Let's pray. Father God, we want to be a church like this, Lord. We don't want to be a place of loose association. A place of rubbing shoulders.

We don't want to be a place where lonely people come to be alone together. Father, we want to be a church that is really and truly family. A place that is sacrificial and hardworking.

[42 : 28] A place that is loving and a place that is persevering. A place where Jesus is the very center. A place where he is glorified. And a place where we love him so much that he transforms our lives.

Transforms our community. A place that was so like this that people on the outside would look in and just be provoked by the community they see.

And that would provoke them to ask why. And we would say that it's all and only because of Jesus. Lord, take our church. Take us individually.

And make us what you would have us be for your glory alone we pray. Amen.