

Romans 12:15

^{12:15} Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

Historical and Cultural Background

- This command comes in the context of other commands relating to how to be a community of Jesus followers. Paul wanted them to renew their minds in light of Jesus, and to live consistently with Christ, not like the unbelieving world (Rom.12:1 – 2). Paul also spoke of living with humility, even as each believer has special gifts and strengths which they contribute to the community and the mission (Rom.12:3 – 8). Then Paul gives general commands about loving one another (Rom.12:9 – 16).
- Paul wrote this letter to the Roman Christians in around 57 AD, from Corinth. The Emperor Claudius had issued a decree to kick all Jews out from the city in 49 AD. That means the Roman church had become mostly Gentile. So Paul was concerned to reestablish connections to the Jewish Scriptures (Rom.1:1 – 8:39), reinvigorate outreach to the Jewish community (Rom.9:1 – 11:36), and renew appreciation for Jewish Christians alongside Gentile Christians (Rom.12:1 – 15:33).
- Paul was a Christian missionary, theologian, and church planter. He was on track towards being a leading Jewish rabbi when he had a conversion experience to Jesus and became convinced that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Jewish law, prophets, and tradition.

Discussion Questions

- What does this command tell me about myself?
- What does this command tell me about God?

Questions

1. What does this command tell me about myself? (i.e. Do I find it easy or hard to empathize with other people?)
 - a. For those who find it easy to empathize
 - i. Why do I find it easy?
 - b. For those who find it difficult
 - i. Why do I struggle with empathy?
 - ii. Perhaps it's jealousy?
 1. Illustration: My wife and I got pregnant with our first child (our son John) within the first week of trying. We were friends with another couple who had a lot of difficulty with getting pregnant. We hesitated a little with telling them. The wife said, 'Well, I could be sad for me but happy for you, at the same time.' I thought that was one of the most emotionally mature things I had ever heard anyone say.
 2. How does jealousy prevent us from rejoicing with those who rejoice?
 - iii. Perhaps it's guilt or shame?
 1. Guilt makes us feel responsible for another person's pain, perhaps, and then we shift into problem-solving mode because we feel like we must help. It might be good to offer help. But sometimes people are just looking for someone to grieve with.
 2. Guilt when it comes to conversations about racial injustice is actually not helpful, in my opinion. A person who shares experiences of injustice and racism isn't usually looking to make you feel guilty, unless you were the direct cause of that experience. They are asking you to grieve with them.
 - iv. Jesus gives us the ability to empathize appropriately. For example, he wept with anger at the tomb of Lazarus. He was empathizing with Mary, who was weeping. And he shares himself with us by his Spirit, so we can share in his love for others.
 - c. Do I find it hard to lament, or weep, with others?
 - i. How easy is it to empathize with the difficulties of being a single mother? That is very relevant in some Christian communities. Or someone outside my typical experience?
 - ii. How do I sense Jesus stretching me towards others, now?
2. What does this command tell me about God?
 - a. God cares about our emotional growth and development. That's part of our character, too.
 - b. God cares about the emotional quality of our community.
 - c. God rejoices with those who rejoice. God weeps with those who weep. Psalm 56 says that God stores our tears in His bottle. He knows why we cry every tear. He cares about everything we go through.
3. Do we allow others to enter our joy and lament?
 - a. Jesus wept and struggled in Gethsemane before he went to his trial and death. He invited his disciples to be with him, as he was in anguish. When I'm in anguish, I don't usually invite people to be with me. But Jesus did.
 - b. Do I feel guilty sharing my joys with some people? Why?
 - c. Do I feel nervous sharing my laments with others? Why?