

Love and Acceptance Romans 15:7

This week in the news Keisha Castle-Hughes has revealed how hard it was being an Oscar-nominated teenager and her struggle with Tall Poppy syndrome. The Kiwi actress, who at one time lived here in Drury started high school the same day the film *Whale Rider* was released.

"I mean your first day of high school sucks anyway. Your backpack is too big, your shoes are too big..." Her new classmates immediately recognised her as the girl from the film and assumed she thought she was better than them. "It's strange how people react to other people's success," she said.

The role later saw Castle-Hughes become the youngest person ever nominated for a Best Actress Oscar - but not everyone was so star struck by the event including her brothers for instance. After years of downplaying her success, the 26-year-old says she has now learnt to be proud of her work and her Oscar nomination. "You can be humble but you can still be proud of the work you've done. It's the biggest misconception." This a young lady who is simply looking for acceptance by her fellow kiwis.

Many people can struggle with a lack of self-confidence, low self-esteem and depression feeling that they are not really important, useful or enjoy a sense of belonging to someone who loves them. As a result too many people in our society resort to harmful habits or people who promise but do not deliver genuine acceptance.

True Biblical acceptance begins by understanding our acceptance is in Christ Jesus and then moves on to getting connected with loving Christians who accept them with an unconditional love that demonstrates all the elements of love as listed in 1 Corinthians 13. As patient and kind...bearing all things, believing the best in everyone, hoping for the best, and enduring all ups and downs in relationships.

Dr. Larry Crabb, a world leading Christian Counsellor, in his book "Connecting," wrote that we experience God's power to heal souls through our compassionate, authentic relationships with others. "What every Christian can pour into another is the powerful passion of acceptance, a passion that flows out of the center of the gospel, a passion that fills the heart of God." That's why we are commanded in Romans 15:7, "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God."

The verb “Accept” means “to receive wholeheartedly, to warmly welcome them to yourself, to grant admission into your heart, to look beyond anything superficial and to be willing and open to build relationships.” In short, “Accept” means to love people just as they are, not for what we intend or hope that they would be. Whilst remembering we all have a deep relational need for others to accept us for who we are” as in the case of Keisha Castle-Hughes.

If this is a vital relational need, how come we find it hard to accept one another? How come instead of accepting each other, we end up judging one another? First, we judge people based on extra-biblical standards. We could not accept a person due to issues that are not necessarily biblical. Romans 14:1 says, “Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.” The Message version goes like this, “Welcome with open arms fellow believers who don’t see things the way you do. And don’t jump all over them every time they do or say something you don’t agree with”. We tend to draw the line where it should not be drawn when we major on the minor. There are some things that are not matters of principles but only preferences. For example, there are churches that are split over the choice of music or the use of certain instruments such as drums. Some like it fast. Others like it slow. I believe it’s more a matter of taste than a matter of theology. That’s why we are to Concentrate on the essentials.

Secondly, we judge people based on exaggerated notions. We could not accept a person because of our first impression. Yes, first impression lasts. But it is just that. An impression! According to 2 Corinthians 5:16, “So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.” In the Contemporary English Version it says, “We are careful not to judge people by what they seem to be”. Impressions are impressions. Always remember that it takes some time to really know a person.

Thirdly, we find it hard to accept others because of our excessive estimation. We judge people based on things that are impossible to assess. For example, we cannot easily judge a person’s motives. According to 1 Corinthians 4:3-5, “My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts. At that time each will

receive his praise from God.” We can judge his actions but not his heart. It is only the Lord who can weigh a person’s motives!

But God has called us to accept one another, not matter what. That doesn’t mean we will condone their sins. That doesn’t mean we will compromise our message. That means we will be committed to each other. We will “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted us”. Christ is our standard. We are to accept people just as or like the way He accepted us. How did Christ accept us? According to Romans 5:8, “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” One writer put it this way, “It is his nature to love the unlovable. His loving acceptance is able to distinguish who we are from what we have done. Even in our sin, we are the objects of his love.” [Ferguson] Christ accepted us unconditionally. Thus, we are to reach out and welcome others unconditionally into our lives. When we do so, it honours God. The purpose for the command to accept each other is so we could, as the scripture says, “bring praise to God.”

Have you ever felt rejected? Rejection is neither final nor fatal. Find your acceptance in Christ because there is no rejection to those that He accepted. For those of us who experienced His love, we are to accept others just like the way he accepted us.

How are people accepted in Christ’s Community?

We are to welcome one another just as Christ has welcomed us, warts and all. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you ... (Romans 15:7a). God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). While remembering it isn’t our job to judge outsiders (1 Cor 5:12)

This doesn’t mean we accept or condone sin. Christ’s community is a place of full acceptance but no compromise. Remember the old saying, “love the sinner hate the sin.” Christ accepts us but he does not accept our sin.

You and I are a walking advertisement of the wonderful love and acceptance of Jesus Christ. Our love for one another will prove to the world that we are Christ’s disciples (John 13:35)

What Now?

Jesus said this ... Those the Father has given me will come to me, and I will never reject them (John 6:37)

God wants you to accept others just like Jesus accepted you.

Maybe you have never experienced God's acceptance before. If you come to him today he will not reject you.

I will share a true story about a Jewish boy who suffered under the Nazis in WWII. The boy was living in a small Polish village when he and all the other Jews of the vicinity were rounded up by Nazi SS troops and sentenced to death. This boy joined his neighbors in digging a shallow ditch for their graves, and then faced the firing squad with his parents. Sprayed with machine-gun fire, their bodies fell into the ditch and the Nazis covered them with a thin layer of dirt.

Amazingly, none of the bullets hit the little boy. He was splattered with the blood of his parents and when they fell into the ditch, he pretended to be dead. The grave was so shallow that the thin covering of dirt did not prevent air from getting through to him so that he could breathe. Several hours later, when darkness fell, the boy clawed his way out of the grave.

With blood and dirt caked to his little body, he made his way to the nearest house and begged for help. Recognizing him as one of the Jewish boys marked for death, he was turned away at house after house, because the people were afraid of getting into trouble with the Nazis. Then something inside seemed to guide him to say something that was very strange for a Jewish boy to say. When the next family answered the door, they heard the boy say, "Don't you recognize me? I am the Jesus you say you love!" After a poignant pause, the woman who stood in the doorway swept him into her arms and kissed him. From that day on, the members of that family cared for that boy as though he was one of their own. (Tony Campolo, *Who Switched the Price Tags?*)

An important key to learning to accept one another is to attempt to relate to each person as if they are Jesus. We do this when we... Seek to treat them the way we would treat Jesus himself. After all, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me...whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me." (Matthew 25:40, 45). So here at DPC... May God enable us to grow into a real Christian community that truly accepts one another as Christ has loved and accepted us to the glory of God! Can you say Amen to That!