

Welcome Back to Romans!

I wonder how many of us feel stuck. How many of us are tired of making the same poor choices over and over and then living with the same negative results. We can probably all identify areas in our lives where we feel chained to a bad habit.

Sometimes it can feel like that if we're not paying for our own mistakes, we're paying for someone else's. Other people's choices can hurt us as much as our own. Even if it's no one's fault, we can get weighed down by the pain and suffering that is unavoidable in our world — disease and disaster, loss and death. We can feel like we're prisoners of circumstances beyond our control.

In Romans, the apostle Paul makes an incredibly bold claim: we don't have to live enslaved to sin or defeated by suffering. He insists that because we are in Christ, we are living new, liberated lives by the Spirit. He insists that because of Jesus, we have hope, peace, and freedom, even though we will continue to live in a world where sin and suffering are realities.

Sound too good to be true? For the next few weeks, let's explore Paul's claims and put them to the test in our own lives. Welcome to Romans 5-7!

Liberated | Week 1

Romans 5:1–11

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Before we dive back into this amazing letter, let's remember where we left off. In our study of Romans 1–4, we were led by the Apostle Paul through an explanation of the gospel, or good news, of Jesus. The gospel is God's power to save lost sinners, and reveals God's righteousness, his faithful commitment to make all things right. Because of Jesus, guilty people, no matter their ethnicity or social standing, can be declared "in the right" before God and be welcomed into his covenant people. This invitation is not issued because of who we are, or what we've accomplished, but because of God's righteousness, grace, and faithfulness. Anyone who places their faith in Jesus can be saved!

Having laid the foundation, we'll now see Paul building on its structure as he gives us a picture of our life with God through Jesus and by the Spirit. In Romans 5–7 we'll discover that in Christ we are no longer slaves to sin and death. Because we live in the age before God fully accomplishes his purposes for humanity, we will struggle in the tension between what was, is, and will be. Yet Paul insists that we can experience peace, freedom, and life now. The implications of his gospel message are not just that we will escape judgment and enjoy eternal life with God (as incredible as that is), but here and now, we can live as the liberated people of God!

Day 1

Before we jump into chapter 5, let's remind ourselves why Paul wrote Romans in the first place. Like a lot of churches in the ancient world, the church in Rome was made up of Jews and Gentiles. The mixing of people from such different backgrounds and lifestyles caused serious friction. In light of everything the Messiah, Jesus, accomplished through his life, death, and resurrection, the Jews were struggling to understand how the Torah and many of the rituals and customs it prescribed fit into their new life in Christ. Or did they have any place at all?

Gentile Christians had come from pagan religions where a pantheon of capricious gods ruled over mortals. While they had been used to making sacrifices to idols in an attempt to win the gods' favor, they had now been introduced to the Lord Jesus and a life of peace and freedom. They were being called to change the way they thought and lived.

Now these two very different groups of people were not only being called to a new way of life, but had to learn how to live together as brothers and sisters in Christ. This would be a

challenge for any church, but in Rome, the intervention of the emperor had made it even more difficult.

During the reign of the Emperor Claudius, Jews, including Jewish Christians were expelled from Rome. During their absence, the Roman house churches became more Gentile. At the time of Paul's writing, Nero was on the throne and had allowed the Jews to come home to Rome. Apparently, upon their return, there were Jewish Christians who were insisting that Gentile believers had to follow the Torah before they could truly be part of God's covenant people. As you might imagine, this caused conflict.

Paul is writing to a church that he didn't start to both explain the gospel more fully and promote unity in this divided church. He took a great deal of care in the opening of his letter to address Jewish Christians and make sure that they understood that it was their faith, not their ethnic identity or Torah observance that made them the covenant people of God. What's more, God had always intended for the Gentiles to be the beneficiaries of the same promises that blessed the descendants of Abraham, the Jewish people. God justifies based on their faith in Jesus as the fulfillment of those promises. Through his death and resurrection Jesus justifies (declares "in the right"), redeems (sets free from slavery) and atones (pays for sin).

Paul is now ready to launch into the glorious implications of all that he has established. As you read the first part of chapter 5, underline all the unbelievable blessings that come to us through Jesus.

Read the Word

Romans 5:1–11 (NIV)

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰ For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹ Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

- List some of the glorious benefits that come to us through Jesus.
- As we move through Romans 5–8, we’ll see Paul shift pronouns. Sometimes he uses “we,” sometimes “you,” and sometimes “I.” We’ll want to pay attention to whom and about whom he is speaking. What pronoun is he using in this section?

Reflect

While the modern church doesn’t divide over issues of circumcision or food laws, we can still struggle to overcome our differences, especially if our focus is on what divides us and not who unites us. All of us who claim the name of Jesus share in the blessings of his righteousness. As we experience the depth of God’s love for each of us, we will find that we have a surplus that we can pour into the lives of others. As those reconciled to God, we can be reconciled to each other. As we learn to boast in the Lord Jesus Christ, we will find no reason to boast over one another.

Pray

If it’s helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Father, I am overwhelmed by your Word. Help me grasp all you have given me in Jesus. Help me believe it and build my life on the reality of who I am in Christ. I want to know and experience your love as it has been poured out into my heart by the Spirit.

Day 2

Most of us have experienced both the joys and the tragedies that life can bring. We’ve been through difficult seasons and know that someday, unless Jesus returns or calls us home, we’ll go through more. Even though we recognize this as true, we don’t despair. As Christians we have assurance that the suffering we endure is never in vain, and it’s never endured alone. Because of Jesus, we can have hope in the midst of suffering.

Read the Word

Romans 5:1–5 (NIV)

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

- The “therefore” in verse 1 connects Paul’s thoughts here to the chapter before it. Look at Romans 4 and remind yourself what it’s about and then consider what the therefore is there for.
- Track Paul’s train of thought in verses 3-4. What produces what?

Reflect

The result of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection is that we can have peace with God. Paul is expounding a far different justice and peace than what is forced at the point of an emperor’s sword. This peace is not just the absence of conflict or enmity, but a return to the shalom of God’s original design.

No longer rebels alienated from God, we have become his sons and daughters. In the first two verses of this chapter, Paul is not only giving a contrast to the *Pax Romana* (Peace of Rome) but calling to mind the temple where the glory of God once dwelled. Because we are justified by faith in Jesus, we can enter into the presence of God and stand firm, surrounded by his grace. Grace here is a shorthand for the sphere of God’s continuing love, kindness and generosity. “Grace is a room into which Jesus has ushered all who believe.”¹

As his image-bearers, humanity was to reflect God’s glory, but sin made us fall far short of that intent (Romans 3:23). What was lost in the Garden of Eden is now available to all who come to God through Jesus and by the Spirit. He is with us now, pouring his love into our hearts and will use the suffering we endure to bring us closer to his image, which is of course, closer to the image of the Son.

As is still true in many cultures today, painful or difficult circumstances were seen as a sign of the gods’ displeasure. Paul challenges that notion with the counter-intuitive call to celebrate in the midst of suffering. Why? Because God is doing a work in us even as we go through pain and hardship. The end result of this work is a tried and tested character, and also hope. We will persevere to the end because God’s love is always with us through the presence of his Spirit.

No matter what you are going through today, you can know that God is there right in the middle of it with you. He will not let you fall. You are safe in his presence, surrounded by his love, and have sure hope for the future.

- Are you going through something hard in your life right now? How do these verses encourage you?
- In a book full of great verses to memorize, this passage has several. Consider writing out verses 3-5 and putting them somewhere you will see them every day. Try to commit them to memory so you can recall them when you need them.

Pray

¹ N. T. Wright, “Romans,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary* 10, (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 429.

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Father, it can be so hard to hold on to faith and hope when I am suffering. The pain can feel overwhelming. When those days come, remind me of your presence. Spirit, wrap me in your love. Jesus, help me cling to the firm and sure hope that you give me. I want to turn to you in prayer, not away from you in despair.

Day 3

I'll admit it. I cry in movies. My family teases me about it, so I'll try to hold it in, but the tears flow, my nose gets stuffy, and eventually I sniff loud enough that they notice. There are certain scenes that almost guarantee the tears, such as when a mom or dad offers to sacrifice their life for their child. Often the parent will bravely face the villain and say something like "take me, only spare my child." I suppose I get weepy because I can imagine myself doing the same thing for one of my children, or husband, or friends. But you know who I never imagine sacrificing my life for? The bad guy.

In the passage we are looking at this week, Paul is exploring the relationship we have with God through Jesus by the Spirit. In the verses we'll look at today, he reminds us what God did to make this reconciliation possible when all of humanity is the "bad guy."

Read the Word

Romans 5:6–8

⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

- Try and recall what you learned in Romans 1–4. Why are we powerless to save ourselves?

Reflect

How do you know that someone loves you? They can say it 1000 times. They can give you beautifully worded cards and even buy you expensive gifts. But there is usually a point in any relationship where the person has the opportunity to demonstrate his or her love and that makes all the difference. You *know* you are loved when someone *shows* you that you are loved.

Paul insists that Jesus' death on the cross is the ultimate demonstration of God's love for us. We couldn't justify ourselves. Paul painstakingly proved in Romans 1–4 that we are all, Jew and Gentile, in need of a Savior. We were powerless to save ourselves.

As God-incarnate, Jesus is God's love in action. If you ever doubt God's love for humanity, re-read Romans 1 and recall all the ways that humanity has rebelled against God, denied his existence, rejected his love, and pursued other paths in a futile attempt to find the peace and wholeness that only comes from the Creator.

Then think about the message of the Gospels. The eternal Son became flesh and lived among us — feeling our pain, knowing our temptations, experiencing our grief. He was rejected by his own people, ridiculed and mocked by those he came to save, shamed by those he loves and died in agony at the hand of those he created.

Then remember some of the times you have rebelled against God, pursued other things in the place of God, and worshipped at the feet of idols like money, pleasure, reputation, and power. The times you have harmed your fellow image-bearers out of selfishness or greed.

Yet even though all of the above is true, Christ died for us. Jesus gave himself for you. If you ever doubt God's love for you, look to Jesus. Look to the cross. It's all the evidence you need.

- Are there times when you doubt God's love for you? What usually triggers that doubt?
- How can remembering the cross help you in those times?

Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Your love is overwhelming! I want to grow in my assurance of your great love. Help me experience it and build my life on it. Forgive me when I turn away from you, rebel against you, or take the life you have given me for granted. Forgive me when I hurt others. I want to love like you love. Change me and teach me how.

Day 4

My mom has a saying that has always stuck with me. When she knows she's about to head into a difficult or painful season of life she often reminds herself, "Well, the Lord hasn't brought me this far just to watch me perish." She has faith that because Jesus saved her and filled her with his Spirit, come what may, he's never going to abandon her. He is faithful.

Romans 5:9–10 brought her saying to my mind. See if you can understand why.

Read the Word

Romans 5:9–11

⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰ For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹ Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

- Do you recall God's wrath coming up in Romans 1–4? Do you remember what we learned about it?
- What about boasting? Do you remember what Paul said about that?

(If you have time, look at Romans 1 and 2 and see what you find.)

Reflect

As they trekked through the wilderness, God's newly liberated people kept having crises of faith. Even though God had freed them from slavery, miraculously parted the sea, rescued them from Pharaoh's army, and was leading them by a pillar of cloud during the day and fire by night, they still doubted that he would provide for them in the desert. It seems like any time they got hungry or thirsty, they would get anxious and worried and accuse Moses of bringing them out into the desert to die (Exodus 16:3, 17:3). They didn't quite believe that God would finish what he started and see them all the way through to what he promised.

When it comes to our personal journeys with God, we can sometimes have similar doubts about our salvation. We know that Jesus died to save us and that we are justified by his blood. But what if we keep sinning? What if we mess up really bad? Will God abandon us? No, God will still finish what he started!

In Romans 1:18 and 2:5-8, Paul has reminded his hearers of the coming day of God's wrath. There will be judgment against sin. How could a just God not bring justice against those who rebelled against him and harmed one another? But Paul assures us that our reconciliation with God is complete. The Son has saved us completely. We are forgiven and justified. Not only have we been declared righteous, but we have been brought into the family of God. For us, God is not a judge to fear, but a Father to love.

In Romans 1–4 Paul has made it clear that neither Gentiles nor Jews have reason to boast apart from what Jesus has done. We cannot boast in our accomplishments, our good deeds, or our heritage (Romans 1:30, 2:17, 2:23, 3:27, 4:2). But we can boast in God because he has saved us and brought us to himself. We "boast in the hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:2) because he will never abandon us.

- What does it mean to you that you are reconciled to God?
- How does this passage give you assurance that you are saved?

Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Father, thank you that I have been reconciled to you through Jesus' life and death. I am secure in your love. I want to know you more. Guide me with your Spirit and keep me from sin. I want to obey you because I love and trust you. I know that your will for my life is best.

Day 5

I don't know about you, but I am greatly encouraged by the passage we looked at this week! Since it's Friday, we will spend some time reflecting on what we've learned, think about how it connects to our lives, spend extended time in prayer, and consider our next steps in following Christ.

Reflect on what you've learned

Look again at Romans 5:1–11. How would you summarize the big idea of these verses?

Make Connections

And there I was...crying in the laundry room. I had a colicky newborn who shrieked and wailed every evening from five to ten, a tantrum-throwing preschooler who had not adjusted well to having a new baby in the house, a house-destroying, five-month-old, golden retriever, because, well, I was foolish, and my father had been diagnosed with stage 3 cancer and was in the middle of chemo. I felt helpless, inadequate, sad, and was crumbling under the weight of it all. That's how I found myself sobbing in my laundry room.

But I wasn't alone. "*Hypomone*" was the word that the Spirit sent straight into my mind. "*Hypomone*: abide underneath." I heard it over and over, and with each mention felt a growing sense of peace. Eventually I went to look it up, and since I had no idea how to spell it, it took a while. But sure enough, it's the Greek word for perseverance or endurance. It literally means "abide underneath." I'm sure I heard this explained in a long-forgotten sermon. But the Spirit chose to bring that word to mind at just the right moment.

I could endure because I wasn't alone. God was with me. I just needed to abide. To stay underneath the weight, but not because I needed to bear it. My Father stood over me and the burden rested on him. I wouldn't be crushed. I was safe. I could shelter there in the Father's love because he is faithful.

Jesus' life, death, and resurrection assure me that I will always be safe, no matter the pain and suffering we endure for a season. Even in death we are safe and secure in our Father's love. It was a difficult time, but guess what? It did produce character. And that character gave me hope.

Two years later I sat in a cramped emergency room stall and heard the doctor tell my Dad that the cancer had returned with a vengeance. It had spread through his lungs and down his spine. He didn't have much hope to offer. Not earthly hope at least.

When he left the room, I pulled my chair up to the side of my father's bed, got out my Bible, and as tears flowed silently down both our cheeks, I read to him from Romans 5. Of course, there is hope. "And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us." A sense of peace flooded the room and together we sheltered in our Father's embrace.

Jesus died to secure hope for us all. Hope in this life and hope for the next. My Dad's hope has become sight, as will all of ours. He knows what we only see squinting through the shadows here. He is home.

God is with you in the hard times too. Believe that in the midst of suffering he is producing perseverance and character and hope. He may not bring to mind a Greek word (he probably reserves that for nerds like me), but he is with you. Your hope will not be put to shame either.

Pray

Based on what you've read and reflected on this week, spend some time with your Father in prayer. To help you get started, here are a few prompts based on our passage for the week. Add your own!

- Thank you, God that I have peace with you through Jesus and have access to your grace (Romans 5:1)
- Thank you that you are growing me through suffering. Help me remember that when I go through hard times. Remind me that you are with me (Romans 5:3–5).
- I praise you for your amazing love that you so clearly demonstrated at the cross (Romans 5:6–8). Because I am secure in your love, show me how I can love others sacrificially.
- Thank you that I am reconciled to you. Help me understand what that means and how to live as one of your children (Romans 9–11).

What's Your Next Step?

We have had the opportunity to rejoice in some glorious truths this week! Now think about how they should change your thoughts and actions. What is the Holy Spirit prompting you to do?