

"Joy in Suffering" Romans 5:1–11

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Date: 26 April 2026

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[0 : 00] Today's New Testament reading is Romans chapter 5 verses 1 to 11.! For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

For one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die. But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. Friends, as a minister, I have, and I mean this when I say it, I have the supreme honor of assisting the Lord in his ministry of shepherding his flock.

On occasion, during my short time in ministry, I haven't been ordained for very long, since 2019. People have invited me into their lives and shared some very difficult situations.

[1 : 43] Situations that are deeply personal and touch on some of the most vulnerable parts of their experience. Most of the times, I try to listen.

I try to do my best listening. I'm still growing in learning how to listen well. I'm trying to ask thoughtful questions and offer comfort from scripture and to pray.

I've come to realize that some of you are hurting. Some of you are suffering. And it's a good thing that you reach out for support and counsel.

However, and again, a very small sample size. I haven't been ordained for very long. But not many people have taken me up on the offer for pastoral counsel or support.

And I say this not to lay a guilt trip on anybody. But I wonder whether this is because such suffering is seen as a deficiency of character.

[2 : 43] Or an admission of great weakness. Or that there is some deep traumatic experiences that are just easier to keep buried.

Or maybe all of the above. We are not very good as a society in processing suffering. We live in an interesting time when social media values both the super put together life.

And also the incredibly vulnerable introspective life. But whether suffering is ignored or whether it's monetized. Our current cultural moment doesn't seem to know how to navigate this very common experience.

And friends, I think it's more common than we realize. It's interesting. This is in my notes. But I'm preparing the text this week.

Studying and trying to wrestle through it. And this week, for a number of different reasons, has been a week where grief from way back when all of a sudden just starts popping up.

[4 : 00] And I am not wanting to deal with any of it. I just want to get on with my life and study the scriptures and present it to you this morning. But it's interesting how the Lord works.

And it's interesting that on this Sunday, he saw fit for me to experience a little bit of suffering as we open the text and wrestle with the topic of suffering this morning.

Our text, Romans chapter 5, verses 1 to 11. It's going to offer a very different take on suffering. One that's very different from our current cultural moment.

And it's this. That the only healthy way to process suffering is to rejoice in it. Let me say that again.

The only healthy way to truly process suffering is to rejoice in it. If some sirens are going off, if some, I don't know, is it okay if I say that I'm going to call, I'm going to say, if your BS meter is going off, stick with me.

[5 : 08] That's not exactly a theological term, by the way. Stick with me. We're going to take a look. We're going to take a look into the text. Ask some honest questions.

I think this text is going to help us tremendously. We're going to see that in this text, we have the basis for rejoicing, especially in suffering. We're going to see that there is a love that allows for this rejoicing.

And then ultimately, we're going to see that we have in Christ a future that allows us to rejoice in the present. Open up verse 1 of Romans chapter 5.

We're going to jump right into it. This is what it says. Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember, we are on a journey in Romans. Paul has led us through chapters 1 to 3, making a fantastic and airtight case that mankind is sinful. We can't justify ourselves.

[6 : 11] We can't deal with our guilt. We can't deal with our sin. We can't deal with our sin. He ends up talking about our need for justification. And now he's going to tell us that there are fruits of being justified, being made right in God's sight.

And the primary one, the primary fruit of justification is peace with God. And it's through Jesus Christ, our Lord. You know, some of our sufferings, not all, but some of them stem from a lack of peace in our relationships, don't they?

Misunderstandings that remain unclarified. Past hurts that are not properly navigated. Fear of confrontation and constant deflection, broken trust.

The needed change that we so desperately want does not come because such a change requires peace.

And that peace demands humility and bravery and agreed upon terms for what peace ought to be. And remember, Paul has already made it extremely clear in chapters 1 through 3 that we are a prideful people.

[7 : 19] We are unable to solve our own ills, nor are we able to compel others to fix theirs. So what happens? Peace remains elusive.

It's important to remember that the whole message of Romans so far is that a lack of peace, especially relational peace, it stems from a lack of peace with our Creator and flows down into every other relationship we have.

Therefore, it makes sense that we see peace as flowing downstream from justification. Through Christ Jesus, we have been justified, right?

We have been made right with God. Because Christ has taken our sin, He has given us His righteousness. We have imputed righteousness.

God counts Christ's righteousness upon us. And the result says that we have peace. A peace on God's terms, not just ours, which means it is a lasting peace.

[8 : 23] And this peace doesn't guarantee that we will automatically be at peace with others. However, it does give us a model and a hope that peace can come in our relationships.

Or that we'll have the strength to endure the pain of relational loss or fragmentation. We can be sure of this because of what Christ has done.

And this, Paul will articulate to us this morning, that this is an objective reality that happened in a very specific place, at a very specific time, with a very specific person.

That is Jesus. That justification is an objective reality we have rooted in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. But justification is not just a past objective access, sorry, not just a past objective reality, but a very present reality, a felt reality that informs and is rooted also in our future hope.

Now, we're going to dig into the future hope on our third point. But Paul here is going to allude to it at the second part of verse 2.

[9 : 33] And this is what he says in verse 2. Through him, we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand.

And we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. What does this mean? To put it simply, we have a dynamic relationship with God that doesn't merely result in the forgiveness that he won on the cross through his son in the past, and then kind of leaves us.

But rather, this dynamic relationship is an ongoing relationship marked by love and deep care for the life we now live. And that life is lived in Christ.

How do we know this? Because we now have a continuous access to the presence of God here on earth. Though it is in part, and because we have this access to the Lord now, we are promised then that we will have full access of his presence in the age to come.

So what we have here is a justification that touches on every aspect of our life. The past, the present, and the future. I really love how John Stott sums this up in his commentary on Romans chapter 5.

[10:49] He was an English evangelical minister. And he says this, quote, Our relationship with God into which justification has brought us is not sporadic, but continuous.

Not precarious, but secure. I love that. But then I ask the question, and maybe this is a question you'll ask as well. But what happens when our relationship with God feels at best sporadic? More like precarious, or even worse, non-existent. What happens when the truth of God's word, namely that we are justified in the past, that God continually gives us grace in the present, and that there's hope for the future glory that is to come, that is not felt at all.

And it hasn't been felt for some time. And it's especially not felt when tribulations or difficulties or sufferings come. And especially when those sufferings come because, and precisely because, we are Christians.

I mean, verse 1, what does it say? That we have been justified by God, and he gives us peace because of that justification. And if that's the case, why can't God then give us a peaceful life, free of issues?

[12:07] Why can't he throw us a bone? Or at least, now that we're on his side, we'll see later on that we're called enemies of his, but now we're on his side. Why can't he, I don't know, help us out a bit?

Why do we have to go through sufferings as Christians? If you have been a Christian for a while, this may be something you've wrestled with. I think it's a very good question to wrestle with because ultimately it will expose a very real and deep and prolific misconception about the Christian life. That suffering and joy are antithetical to what it means to be a Christian. Or they're antithetical, rather, to each other.

That suffering is antithetical to what it means to be a Christian. But look what Paul says in verse 3 here, the first part of verse 3. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings.

It's not just that sufferings will come, Paul says, but that we are to rejoice in them. Rejoice in our sufferings? How is it possible to rejoice in our sufferings?

[13:20] Especially if our sufferings are something very, very deep and ongoing that we wear around from the moment we wake up until the moment we go to bed.

Seven days a week. Okay, 12 months a year. I think it's very important that we read carefully what Paul wrote here. Especially considering what he didn't write.

So, what does Paul say? He says, not only that, but we rejoice in our suffering. What he doesn't write is that we rejoice for our sufferings. The scriptures are repeatedly clear that suffering is not to be celebrated or sought out.

It's not to be endured with a stoic demeanor. Mourning and loss and fasting, sorry, mourning, loss and fasting for an end to calamity are repeatedly seen as commendable in scripture.

It is a good thing and a right thing to pray to God to end our suffering, whatever it may be. To bring a swift end to it. It's a good thing. Paul is not saying, listen, suffering is going to come and you need to hug it with all of you.

[14:34] You need to embrace every aspect of it. No, he is not saying that. He is saying that we are to rejoice in our suffering. Suffering will come in this life.

And it comes in this life because we live in a very fallen world full of selfishness and pride and lying and disease and tragedy and lots of greed.

We will also suffer for Christ for this fallen world is currently against him. The gospel reading, if you go back into it, John 16, it says that Jesus says to his disciples, you're going to mourn but the world will rejoice.

The world is currently at odds against Christ. And it is because we are in Christ, made right by him, by grace, through faith, that we can trust that God is allowing these sufferings, but for a very specific purpose, as a means for our growth and for his glory.

In fact, it is often the primary means he uses for our maturity. But why? Why not mature us with ecstatic experiences, right?

[15:51] These fantastic experiences. If you have gone to a youth conference or a charismatic conference, you have these ecstatic experiences, and you will capture the mountain for Jesus, okay?

You will proclaim his goodness. You are mature in the faith. Why not just give us these ecstatic experiences in Christ? Why not mature us with blessings and bounty, okay?

Why not use logic or reason? Why not a good study of history? Remember the adage, those who don't know history are bound to repeat it. Why not mature us through a good study of history to make us wise and mature in the Christian faith?

Such questions, as honest as they may be, start, I would humbly put forward to you, with a false premise. And the false premise is this, that tragedy and pain are the exception to life, but rather what we are really about and what we deserve is bounty and wealth and health.

But I think we have collectively, in the West, in this modern era we live in, we have forgotten that this world is jagged and rough and dark and dangerous. It is.

[17:09] That this world is full of sin and evil. Life is tragically taken every day, but we seldom see it here in Ottawa. We live in a very insulated existence where we are not regularly exposed to death, but this is not the case globally or historically.

And I just want to say, thank God, okay? I'm not trying to somehow make us feel guilty for being a bit insulated from death, but when we forget how tragic this world can be, beautiful, yes, I mean, nature in its splendor, creation in its splendor, fantastic, we can see so many wonderful things, but by and large, this world is marked by pain.

Here's a bit of an example that helps to put it in perspective. 2025, okay? Cape Town, South Africa, in terms of large cities, had the most homicides in 2025.

A city of about 4 to 5 million people in urban and suburban. There's about 3,000 homicides, just under. Ottawa, last year, 19.

Okay, 19. 19 tragic losses of life, but it kind of goes to show how insulated we are in this city from how tragic and difficult this world is.

[18:40] I mean, we had one just this past week, I think it was the 5th of the year, we're in April. This is horrendous that five people have died this way. Five people? For a city of a million?

We often forget about how difficult things are globally. But historically, we talked about this in Catechism 100 years ago, and then for every generation earlier, it was almost for sure that you would outlive at least one of your children.

Right? That's not something we worry about by and large now. And when children are sick, like it was back then, a tragedy, but it is something somewhat foreign to us.

I think we start with the wrong premise. And the thing with suffering is that it has a way of bringing this reality back to the forefront. In a way that an ecstatic experience at a youth worship service, as good as those are, can't do.

And a study of history can't do. And wealth and bounty can't do. And logic and reason just can't do. C.S. Lewis in *The Problem of Pain*, man, I'm quoting a lot of Lewis lately, sue me, okay?

[19:57] I'm reading this. And *The Problem of Pain* really articulates this wonderfully. And this is what he says. We can rest contentedly in our sins and in our stupidities.

And anyone who has watched gluttons shoveling down the most exquisite foods as if they did not know what they were eating will admit that we can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists on being attended to.

God whispers to us in our pleasures. He speaks in our conscience. But he shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.

Suffering gives us the opportunity to understand that this world is very difficult, but also to understand that there's a sovereign God and that sovereign God gives grace and that grace is like nothing else that is offered in this world.

And it's far better than any self-help plan or any kind of personal inventory and therapy. You can take good things, but it is far greater.

[21:04] And suffering has this ability to help us with that. Why? Because when we suffer with an eye to the Lord and our world is shaken, we realize that the things that we've truly hoped in turn out to be very false things.

And that these false things, those things that promise to carry us through any storm but shrink back when the smallest gray cloud appears, are exposed for what they are.

And the only thing that can help us to endure is what? The grace and love of God. And we only come to that realization when pain comes.

Those painful experiences become then opportunities for us to look to Christ and find our hope in the unchanging God. Look with me at verses 3, 4, and then the first part of verse 5.

For what does the scripture say? Oh, sorry, that's wrong. John Page. Verse 3. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance.

[22 : 10] Endurance produces character. Character produces hope. And hope does not put us to shame. Endurance, or better translated, single-mindedness, it's an idea that helps us to focus on the stuff of true value.

The stuff that will truly last. The stuff of the Lord. And as we grow in this single-mindedness, we also grow in character. An idea of the testedness and confidence that comes when we put our hope in God that Christ is truly enough to give us the strength in our time of need.

And what does this ultimately lead us to? A hope that will not disappoint. A hope in the most sure and secure reality that we are at peace with God in Christ Jesus.

A hope rooted in the objective reality of what Christ has done in the past that spills into the present. That gives us hope for the future. And because it won't let us down, it means that by His strength, by His grace, we can face our sufferings not with a stoic grit or a kind of pleasure in pain, but rather in the unchanging God who sent His glorious Son to die and rise again and to conquer the very power that animates all the suffering that we will ever experience.

You see, in Christ, suffering is transformed from an utter, unredeemable horror into a furnace that becomes the means by which our lives are refined, where we grow in our love and our affection of Christ.

[23 : 59] You see, what does a furnace do? It heats a chunk or a hunk of rock, right, that is all a bunch of elements mashed together and it's only with heat that you can separate those elements, right?

The gold or the silver remains and the other things are burnt off. The dross, the impurities are burnt away, but what is, how does that come about?

Only through a furnace. Only through heat. only through suffering. It's really interesting throughout the Bible and we see it connected here in verses 2 and 3 that glory and suffering are often connected throughout Scripture.

So why must we suffer to grow? Why must we suffer if we want to partake in the glory of God, of this glorious God? because there isn't really another way.

So we need to be sure that it's true. But it's hard to believe that it's true because some of us have gone through stuff and some of us don't just have scars from the past but have open wounds in the present.

[25 : 16] Not little pricks, not little scrapes, pussy, nasty, painful, difficult wounds. The very idea that God has ordained that or at least at the very least allowed it even as a means of refinement may cause doubt rather than joy in Christ.

And more than that, there are people, maybe people here this morning who are faith curious. Okay? They want to put their trust in a higher power whoever he, she, it may be for ultimate meaning but also that higher power, it ought to work in this life.

It has to work for me. It has to help me deal with the pain and the difficulty and it seems that the Apostle Paul is saying actually the pain persists and it's actually a feature of this faith.

And this brings us to our second point, verses 5 to 8. Let's read verses 5. We'll read the full verse but we're going to focus on the second half of verse 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. Suffering in the context, in this context assures us of God's love which is kind of an ironic thing because suffering oftentimes can be the cause of great doubt about the love of God.

[26 : 48] I know people personally and maybe you have as well. Maybe you are wrestling with this now where the suffering that you've experienced is the beginning or at least the very thing that is pushing you away from the Christian faith.

Causing you to doubt it or to deconstruct it altogether. And I would say that makes sense if our salvation, if our ultimate hope is a self-wrought, a self-conceived, a self-justified salvation, even if it is wrapped in Christian wrappings and in Christian lingo and Christian ritual.

If our salvation does not begin and end with Christ, then our suffering has the real potential to break us. Right? If we are thinking, listen, I am going to do well and be good and try hard and this will get me to where I want to go, it will work out well for me in this life and suffering comes, then all of our

efforts have been in vain.

All of our efforts will be in vain. But if our salvation, if it is in Christ, then the promise is that we have been changed.

We have not renovated our soul, but he has. What does he do? It says in scripture time and again in both testaments that he removes a heart of stone and he gives instead a heart of flesh.

[28 : 19] He does a renovation inside. God gives us a soft heart so that we can experience his love and learn to rejoice in this glorious God.

And along with seeing the world for what it is, suffering can open our eyes to the love of God which gives us incredible hope. When we realize the degree to which God loved us, we understand that our sufferings are small compared to his.

And when we understand that his sufferings were not forced upon him but that God, the Son of God, voluntarily takes suffering upon him because of love, because he loves us, he wants us to know and feel his love.

Right? Verse 5, the second part of it, it says that this love is poured out to us, continually poured out. It's like being caught in a quick moving river then the ideal of his love becomes increasingly concrete, becomes increasingly real in our lives and it is because of suffering, it is because of pain. There was a wonderful, beautiful lady and I'm not sure if she's still around. I knew her, she was in her 80s but as the early years when I was an intern on Fridays I was an advocate companion to an elderly man that had dementia and they were two, this wonderful couple, the man had dementia and it was progressing and the wife was struggling with her own health issues and as the dementia worsened, the man who wasn't violent and who wasn't aggressive became violent and became aggressive and she struggled with it and then he died and then her health concern worsened and I remember talking with her and she would say in her pain that she never knew a closeness to Christ as those last years when her husband was still alive and especially after she struggled and life didn't get easy and

[30 : 29] I'm not sure if she's still alive or not. We fell out of contact but it is remarkable to me that it wasn't despite suffering but because of the suffering she went to that drew her to the love of God in a way even though she knew Christ, knows Christ, she's known him since she was just a little girl but it was in those last years that she really knew his love and really experienced his love and knew it so personally and concretely.

And how does God show us his love? He doesn't say I love you, okay? Pat us on the tush as we're off to school.

He says I love you with an embrace. Okay? He demonstrates his love. How? Verse 6, 7, and 8.

Read with me. For while we were still weak at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

For one will scarcely die for a righteous person. Though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die. But God, how does he show his love? Shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

How does God love us? How does he show his love? We are called ungodly, verse 6. We are called sinners, verse 8. Later on in verse 10 it says that we are enemies of him. We have no business demanding anything from him.

[32 : 00] enemies don't set the terms. Okay? Especially when we are sinful and God is perfect. When we are unrighteous and he is righteous.

When we are finite and he is infinite. We don't set the terms of this. We have no business demanding anything from God. He is not in our pocket. He does not owe us a red cent.

And what does he do? He loves us and he demonstrates his love for us by reconciling us. You see our condition was so bad, our rebellion so severe that the only means of reconciliation was the son of God himself and it says that he did it while we were still his enemies.

Friends, that's love. That's a love that is heavenly. heavenly. There's no higher love than Christ. So you see then that if you truly grasp that Christ has justified us, that he has made peace with us, that even though suffering comes, that it is a way that can shake us out of our malaise, out of our spiritual slumber and that we can see that Christ is the only thing that can truly help us to endure and the only one that is worthy of our hope and that when he died on the cross, he did so as for sinners as we were still sinners then we understand then that rejoicing and suffering, they are married here.

This is the source of our hope. He does not speak love in the abstract but Christ shows his love is real and that it is deep and that it is immovable, that it is dense and because this love begins in the

past, in the historical death and resurrection of Christ and continues into the present with the love of God continually pouring out for us, we can have a certain hope that our future will be even greater and more glorious and that our pain as deep as it is, and friends, it might be unbelievably deep, it is momentary compared with the joy we will experience in eternity.

[34 : 23] It's called divine perspective and brings us to our third and final point, look with me at verses 9 to 11. Since therefore we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God, for if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by his life.

More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. So far, we have seen that we have been justified, we have been made righteous because of Christ, our sins counted against us no more, therefore we have peace with God.

Right here, the wrath of God is no longer a danger against us, that at the end of the age we will stand before God and we will not have to fear his just wrath upon us.

That in Christ we have been given grace to grow through trials and we are given this ultimate hope of the life to come that pours into the life in the present.

Yet there is even more, Paul says. He says that we are reconciled with God. He says it's even better than we could have imagined for if God treats his enemies with this kind of sacrificial love, love that is connected to suffering and the greatest kind of suffering, how much more will God treat us who are now reconciled to him?

[36 : 09] If he treats his enemies with this love, how much more will he treat us now that we are sons and daughters of the Most High? We can only pose the question, okay?

We can ponder it and meditate on it and it will be worth every minute you spend doing so, but we have no idea the glory that we have in Christ Jesus now that we are sons and daughters of the Most High.

I think to help us understand this we have to consider what used to be. The biblical story begins in a garden that was perfect in every way and at the center of this perfection it was mankind.

The scripture talks about mankind enjoying a deeply loving relationship with God, but what happens? Pride enters into the story and all that reality of the garden was lost, all that relational intimacy and deep love and friendship was lost and humanity has been searching for a way back ever since.

And what was lost in the garden in Christ is restored. In the garden Adam and Eve were expelled before they could taste the tree of life, but the promise for us is that if we put our faith in Christ who reconciled us when we were yet his enemies, we will not just be restored to this Edenic existence, existence, but we will be made perfect and we will get to partake in the tree of life.

[37 : 45] And what is the tree of life? It's Christ himself who gives himself for our eternal nourishment so that we can be sure that we would be in the presence of God forever to experience his glory and grandeur with unveiled face forever without the possibility of falling ever again.

That's what awaits us. And we can use human language in the most flowery of prose, but we will never quite grasp what awaits us. You know, verses 9 to 11, it tells us that God, this is how he treats his enemies.

He gives them hope. We are no longer his enemies. We are his sons. The suffering we experience is, it prepares us for our future glory with Christ because it strengthens our faith so that we hope in someone, not something, that will never forsake us.

Does that not transform suffering? Does that not help us walk towards it with bravery and courage? Not that we've found deep within us, but that it is given to us from Christ? So suffering still is difficult, okay?

It's still to be avoided. But when it inevitably comes, we can trust that God will use it to open our spiritual eyes, give us strength and grace, and help us to hope in heaven.

[39 : 20] I'll end with this. Before his passion, Christ's own sufferings, the disciples in a very classic disciple faction proclaim their belief in a very self-righteous and self-confident way.

They say, you know, we believe in you, Jesus. Jesus tells them immediately after that they won't stick around when the first threat comes their way, but they will scatter and that he will be left alone. And then he says something remarkable. This is from John 16, verses 32 and 33. He says this, Behold, the hour is coming. Indeed, it has come when you will be scattered, each to his own home,

