

TRIED AND TRUE

How Joy in Suffering Produces Confident Hope in God

Romans Series
PBC 2025

Text: Romans 5:1-11 (Rom. 8:18-25; James 1:2-8; 1 Peter 1:18-25; 4:12-19; Matthew 7:13-14; Acts 14:19-22).

*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.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.**³ **Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings,** knowing that suffering produces endurance,⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ **More than that, we also rejoice in God** through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

Matthew 7:13-14 *Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is **hard** that leads to life, and those that find it are few.*

Acts 14:19-22 *Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.²⁰ But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.²¹ When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many **tribulations** we must enter the kingdom of God.*

Introduction:

As we continue our journey through this section of Romans, we encounter one of the most challenging gospel-related passages to understand and apply, especially considering all the blessings and benefits we've

discovered are ours when we turn from our sins to follow Jesus. The text I am referencing is found in Romans 5:3, where Paul makes this surprising statement about true believers – *“We rejoice in our sufferings (plural).”*

To truly understand and apply this statement as believers, we must clarify what Paul means and why the Holy Spirit inspired him to include it in this list of things that should bring us great joy. We need to understand why suffering is included in this list.

1. Presented in a beautiful context: astonishing, bountiful blessings that became ours when God justified us (Rom. 4:1 - 5:11)

- a. Blessing of our sins (past, present, or future) never again being counted against us because of the full, perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to us (4:1-12)
- b. Blessing of becoming full participants in the inheritance God promised Abraham when He promised to make Abraham “heir of the world” (4:13-25)
- c. Permanent, personal, unbreakable peace with God (5:1)
- d. Permanent standing in God’s Kingdom of Grace and unrestrained personal access to God’s gracious presence (5:2)
- e. A transformed, joy-producing perspective as we live in a sin-broken, death-tasting world (5:3-11).
 - Joy despite the futility and emptiness because we are confident of our future glorification (5:2)
 - Joy amid the pain of extended suffering, relentless opposition, and ruthless persecution because of what suffering produces in us and what it affirms about our faith (5:3-100).
 - Joy despite our alien status in this life as we experience and enjoy God’s intimate presence, love, and favor (5:11).

2. Obtained by a solitary, simple requirement – obedient faith. (5:1)

3. Resulting in a troubling question – “Do I have that kind of faith?”

Put differently: Do you trust God, or have you just believed in God?

This is a crucial question for all of us this morning, especially those of us who grew up in church, participated in Christian activities, or received a Christian education – in other words, we've been surrounded by and immersed in gospel talk our entire lives.

Many of us have believed the central claims of that Gospel and would personally affirm its core theological components. We have adorned ourselves with outward appearances and performed the basic outward expectations we were taught about the gospel.

But, when you press in on our lives, there are two uncomfortable realities that we would just as soon not think about and most certainly would do everything we can to avoid talking about:

1. There is in many of us an inner doubt that surfaces from time to time about the genuineness of our faith.
2. We grapple with the uncomfortable reality that the outer spiritual appearance we present to others does not align with the internal condition of our soul or what we truly experience within ourselves.

And when we hear sermons on Romans, where Paul encourages us not just to believe correct theology about justification but to truly experience and cherish it as an incredible blessing (chapter 4), or to embrace the profound truths that we have peace with God, access to the kingdom of grace, and a standing before the throne where God pours out His mercy and grace, we often feel unsure of what to do besides nodding, quietly saying amen, and then walking out the door back into our everyday lives that are so different from what Paul describes in these texts.

We know that Paul rejoiced in the hope of the glory that awaited him—the glory that Jesus displayed at His transfiguration and that he saw on the road to Damascus—the same glory that Moses and Elijah showed in

their transformed bodies (5:2). We also know that He rejoiced in the close, personal relationship he had with God (5:11). And we naturally believe he was sincere when he said he rejoiced in suffering (5:3).

But honestly, for most of us, those realities seem more suited for super-Christians like Paul than for everyday believers like us.

And because these truths are uncomfortable, our lives are busy, and our souls are distracted by the noise of life, we push these questions aside until we reach a point where they can no longer be ignored.

And for some of you, that time might be now.

So – with that in mind, I want us to ask ourselves this important question: *Is my faith genuine? I have believed the truths of the gospel; I have affirmed the core doctrines of the Christian faith; and I am trying to live by them – but am I truly trusting the Jesus I say I believe in?*

And to find the answer to that question, I want us to ask Paul, ***“How does a believer know their faith is real? How can I be sure I have peace with God? That I have access to the throne of Grace? That I have been granted permanent standing in the kingdom of grace? How can I be confident in this life about the glorious future God has promised me in the life to come?”***

And Paul’s answer would be this: **“You can be confident in these things by evaluating your response to suffering.”**

I. The Surprising Statement – we rejoice in our sufferings (5:3a)

*Not only that, but we rejoice in our **sufferings***

A. What does it mean to Rejoice?

- The term “rejoice” means more than just being happy.
- Conveys the idea of confident joy or unrestrained celebration.

- The context in which Paul uses this term describes unquenchable, unrestrained joy in something or someone because we are confident of the outcome and trust in the person involved.
- This response is personal (“our” sufferings).
- This response is the consistent, repeated pattern of our life (present tense verb).

B. When are we to Rejoice?

- We rejoice “in our sufferings”
- Paul uses a very strong word for suffering (θλίψις).
- This term refers to the extraordinarily difficult, excruciating, tear-producing, soul-troubling, hope-crushing, life-threatening circumstances that believers faced as they carried the gospel throughout the Roman Empire in Paul’s day.
- It describes the intense, agonizing, painful, and overwhelming pressure that everyone, including believers, faces in this life. Peter describes these experiences as “fiery trials” (1 Pet 4:12).

Here are some examples:

1. **Life hurt** we all experience in a broken, sin-cursed world, as Solomon describes in Ecclesiastes, where sometimes what should happen to the wicked happens to the righteous, and what should happen to the righteous happens instead to the wicked (Ecclesiastes 8:14-15).
2. **Sin hurt** that comes from our own sins or those of others. Solomon reminded us that the way of the transgressor is painfully difficult (Prov 13:15). Jesus was very transparent with his disciples, saying that people would sin against them often, and he instructed them to forgive them even 70 times seven (Matt. 18:22).
3. **People hurt** we encounter in the relationships we have with others. Paul talked about this to the Thessalonians when he said, “*See that no one repays evil for evil, but always try to do*

good to each other and to all people” (1 Thess 5:15; cf Rom 12:17). Peter said it even more emphatically, “Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing” (1 Pet. 3:9).

4. **Ministry hurt** – Paul described the deep suffering he encountered in the course of his ministry to the churches, especially the hurt he experienced from those he served selflessly, graciously, and truthfully – like the Corinthians – who turned against Paul when they grew uncomfortable when he confronted them with the truth from Scripture. They accused him of deceit and seeking to use them for his own self-serving advantage. Listen to his plea to them in 2 Cor 12:15-19, *“I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less? ¹⁶ But granting that I myself did not burden you, I was crafty, you say, and got the better of you by deceit. ¹⁷ Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? ¹⁸ I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps? ¹⁹ Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved.”*
5. **Gospel hurt** for the sake of Christ. Peter reminds us of that we are called to share in the same kind of suffering Christ experienced as we take the good news of the gospel to the nations and call them to repent and believe (1 Pet 4:12-19).

II. The Scriptural Confirmation (Jesus, Paul, James, Peter)

Jesus and all three of the major NT writers affirm the reality of ongoing suffering, affliction, and persecution in their lives and in the lives of their followers.

In other words, the gospel does not eliminate suffering and pain in this life. In fact, our commitment to the gospel will result in greater suffering in our lives. Here are sample statements from Jesus, Paul, Peter, and James that affirm this reality.

A. Jesus: Matthew 5:10-12; 7:13-14

- **Matthew 5:10-12** *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*
- **Matthew 7:13-14** *"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is **hard*** that leads to life, and those who find it are few. (*note the term "hard" is the word Paul uses for suffering in Rom 5:3)*

B. Paul: Acts 14:21-22

- **Acts 14:21-22** *When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.*

C. Peter: 1 Peter 4:12-14

- **1 Peter 4:12-14** *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.*

D. James: James 1:2-4; 12

- **James 1:2-4, 12** *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. . . . ¹² Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.*

Clearly, the Scripture affirms that believers will experience the same kind of pain and suffering common to unbelievers around them. Additionally, Jesus and the apostles plainly tell us that we will face the same kind of suffering for our faith that they did.

If we are honest, this is not a surprise to us. The surprise is in Paul's statement (and the confirmation of that statement in the lives of believers) – that Christians respond to such suffering with unbridled, unrestrained joy. And we want to know why and how they respond this way. And Paul gives us a hint – it rests with something they know and are firmly convinced about (5:3b). ***They frame how they feel about suffering based on something they know about suffering.***

III. The Spiritual Fruit Suffering Produces (5:3-4)

knowing that suffering **produces** endurance,⁴ and endurance **produces** character, and character **produces** hope,

- What do we **know** about suffering that should **produce** the kind of exuberant joy in our hearts that Paul describes here?
- We rejoice because we understand that whenever suffering appears, it is developing three incredible qualities we truly desire in our lives: strong endurance, proven character, and unshakeable confidence.
- Note Paul tells us that suffering “produces” (κατεργάζεται) certain qualities in us. This term “produce” means to “work out” or to “bring about” in someone or something. We could say it this way: When suffering shows up in our lives, God goes to work and **uses suffering** to produce three indispensable qualities in us.

A. Strong Endurance that Perseveres Under Pressure

- The term “patience” does not refer to our reaction to God’s apparent silence or absence when we most need His voice and desire His presence – like Job’s experience.
- Nor does it refer to waiting graciously when others are slow or fail to meet our expectations (waiting for a late appointment or showing patience toward a waiter who messes up our order).
- This term (ὑπομονή) refers to “bearing up under” or enduring extreme, prolonged pressure. It is similar to the beams that support a building or a bridge – they “bear up” or “endure” great force without collapsing.
- Suffering is what God uses to build the inner strength in us that helps us endure the long, painful pressures of life. It’s how God develops a deep strength that keeps us connected to His goodness, wisdom, and love instead of turning away in search of someone whose plan for our lives offers a more acceptable kind of “goodness,” a “wisdom that makes more sense,” or a love that feels “more loving” than what we are experiencing at the moment.

B. Proven Character that Passes the Test

- Endurance produced by suffering works out something even more important in our lives – proven character.

- And this highlights the authenticity of our faith. The NT writers describe two types of faith claims: one that expresses correct theology but is dead and powerless, and another that is alive and active in the believer's life.
- James makes clear that a “word-only” faith is powerless to save us because it is dead. And the evidence that it is dead is that it produces nothing in the life of the believer.
- James describes a living faith as being validated (justified) by what it produces—obedience that endures despite difficulties because it continues to believe and trust in God!
- Jesus described four types of responses from people who hear the gospel: 1) hard soil that outrightly rejects the gospel; **2) *rocky soil that gives an immediate response but quickly fades when suffering and tribulation come***; 3) thorny soil where the initial response is distracted by life's worries or the deceitfulness of riches; and 4) soft soil that receives the gospel and produces fruit in different amounts. (Matt 13:18-23)
- Suffering tests our belief in God's goodness (is He truly good), His wisdom (is He really wise), and His love (does He genuinely love me). These very questions in 1:18-32 lead pagan people to turn away from God to idols.
- When you suffer, either you hold on to the goodness of God or you look for a better “goodness.”
- When you suffer, you either turn to God and rely on His wisdom or seek someone who can offer you better wisdom.
- When you suffer, you will either rest in the love God has for you or look for a better lover.
- And when you hold on to God because you know He is good, wise, and loving in the midst of your pain and suffering – when your faith perseveres – it has been validated and confirmed by testing!

C. Firm Confidence that won't prove Empty or Vain

- And when suffering-produced endurance validates the character of your faith, it produces firm confidence that will not be shaken by unbelief, doubt, or disheartenment (discouragement).
- Satan is the father of lies and the accuser of the brethren – he accuses us to God, to each other, and to ourselves.
- And one of the main tools he uses to accuse us to ourselves is to destroy or damage our confidence in our standing before God.
- He gets us to doubt our salvation now in this life by challenging our faithfulness. He gets us to doubt our salvation in the future on the day of judgment by challenging God's faithfulness.
- But the most serious accusation he presents is that our prolonged, painful suffering proves that God does not love or care for us. This is what he tried to do to Jesus during the temptation, and he repeats this tactic in our lives over and over.
- BUT – if we hold on to the promises God has made to us in the Gospel and if we keep trusting God in suffering no matter how long or how difficult, here is what Paul said would happen – we would overflow with hope! *“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope!” (Rom 15:13).*
- And what gives us unshakeable hope in prolonged suffering is something the Holy Spirit does – He fills us with a deep assurance of the love of God! Paul described it this way: *“The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us!”*

And all of this answers the first of two major doubts: How do I know that my faith is real? How do I know that when I most need it to work, my faith will deliver me?

But there is a second question that this text answers – How do I know God will be faithful to His promise to deliver me?

IV. The Strong Confidence Suffering Affords to Strengthen Hope (5:5)

and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Suffering doesn't just cause us to question our love and faithfulness to God; it causes us to question God's love and faithfulness toward us. How does God assure us of His love and faithfulness in light of the reality of suffering? "How do we know God really loves us?"

A. Experientially, by means of the Spirit's work

because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

- The word "because" is the grounds or reason that our confidence in God is not in vain.
- Note that Paul does not proceed to give us an argument or a logical premise that leads to a logical conclusion. He has and will build his case through logical argumentation. But here, when believers are suffering, he points to something they need more than a logical explanation – he points to something they have experienced!
- In giving you the Holy Spirit who indwells you, God has given you what you most need in a time of deep, prolonged, spiritually exhausting suffering to assure you that He knows and cares!
- The Holy Spirit has a special ministry from God to us when we suffer – He pours out and floods our lives with the love of God.
- Repeatedly, the HS reminds us in word, song, sermon, providence, kindness, and provision that God is good and wise and that He loves us! But how do we know that what we feel in our hearts is true?

B. Objectively, by the facts of the Gospel (5:6-10)

- ***The unusual proof of God's love for us is seen in what Christ did through the Gospel (5:6-8)***—God loved us in a way that far surpasses any other human love we experience in life. God continually demonstrates His love for us (present tense) in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
- He died for us while we were ungodly, enemies hostile toward Him. Since God justified us by the blood (violent

death) of His Son, we are assured that we will be saved by Him (Jesus) from God's wrath.

- ***The ultimate proof of God's love is seen in what Christ will do for us because of the Gospel (5:9-10).*** If, as enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son; how much more, now that He has reconciled us, will we be saved by His life?

C. Relationally, by means of intimate fellowship with God (5:11)

- You learn the theological reality of God's love in Scripture. You see the love of God objectively in the Gospel. But you experience it for yourself in profound and undeniable ways in suffering!
- There is a profoundly personal ministry that God Himself performs for His children when they suffer for their faith – He Himself restores, confirms, strengthens, and establishes them in grace. (1 Pet 5:10).

Conclusion:

- Peter tells us that when we endure suffering joyfully the way Paul describes in our text, it is a “gracious thing” in God's sight. **1 Pet 2:19** *“For this is a gracious thing when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly . . . If, when you do good and suffer for it, you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.”*
- So, what can I do this morning to change my perspective and align myself with Paul and the Holy Spirit regarding suffering in my life?

1. Am I enduring suffering, or am I tempted to turn away from God?
2. Am I suffering graciously in ways that please God, or am I enduring sinfully in ways that violate the commands God has given me?
3. Am I trusting God's goodness, relying on His wisdom, and experiencing His love through the Holy Spirit – or have I grieved the Spirit in word or deed?
4. Am I trusting the faithful Creator and continuing to do good, or am I relying on my own understanding (1 Peter 4:19)?