

AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

ROLLING HILLS COMMUNITY CHURCH

GOD'S WILL FOR YOUR LIFE INCLUDES THANKSGIVING.
ROMANS 5:1-8; 1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18
11/12/2017



MAIN POINT

We can give thanks in all circumstances knowing Jesus has plans amidst every experience.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

When was the last time you heard someone ask the question, “Why do bad things happen to good people?”

Why do you think this question never seems to go away? What does it assume about humankind’s moral nature?

When faced with tragedy, are you prone to retreat from the situation by pursuing distractions and comforts, such as food and entertainment, or are you inclined to direct your energy and attention toward “fixing” or improving the situation? Explain.

What does your answer tell you about the source of your hope and contentment?

Hard times reveal our true character. When our creaturely comforts or earthly securities are compromised, our subsequent actions betray where our hope and contentment really lie. We live in a sin-cursed world (see Rom. 5:12-19), and it is because of sin’s penalty that we die (Rom. 6:23). Thus, as Christians, we approach life with a sober realism, expecting to experience happiness and sadness, triumph and tragedy, knowing that God sends the rain to fall on the righteous and unrighteous alike (Matt. 5:45). As Christians, our ability to rejoice in all circumstances stems from where we place our faith. Paul teaches us in Romans 5:1-5 that our hope is found in the person of Jesus Christ.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 5:1-2.

Why do you think it is important for us to connect the present with the future, as Paul does here? What does our present right standing with God giving us a hope for the future tell us about God’s

faithfulness?

What did you know about the doctrine of justification by faith alone prior to studying this passage? Why is it important that we place our trust in Christ alone for both our present status before God and our future salvation?

Paul clearly states that because we have been justified (i.e., declared legally righteous) by faith in Christ, we have no reason to fear condemnation from God; we have peace with Him objectively. On top of that, since we are presently under God's grace, we have a future hope as well, "the hope of the glory of God." Our present salvation in Christ gives us a reason to be confident about our future in Christ when we will share in glory with Him (see also Rom. 8:28-30).

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 5:3-4.

Why does it seem counter-intuitive to nonbelievers to rejoice amidst suffering? What does this tell us about the "upside-down" nature of the gospel and the kingdom of God?

Have you encountered any teaching within the church or broader Christianity that minimizes or overlooks—perhaps intentionally—the role of suffering in the Christian life? How is this a misunderstanding of the gospel of a crucified and risen Messiah and God's sovereignty over our suffering?

The first question of the Heidelberg Catechism asks, "What is your only comfort in life and in death?" Part of the answer states that because the believer belongs to Jesus "not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation." This is at the heart of what Paul is teaching here in Romans 5:3-5. We can rejoice in suffering not only because we are secure in Christ but also because God is in control of our circumstances and uses them to make us more like Christ. Furthermore, we are reassured of God's love and favor toward us because of the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives, reminding us that Christ died on behalf of ungodly sinners like us (see vv. 6-8).

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 5:5-8.

Why is it important to distinguish between God's work in us (i.e., the Spirit's reminding us of God's love shown in the cross) and God's work for us (i.e., Christ's dying on the cross to reconcile us to God)?

How does the cross show us that love is more than a fuzzy feeling or mushy emotion?

Why is it important that we look to the cross and the Spirit's work in our lives rather than to our circumstances in order to be reassured of God's love for us?

Recall a specific time when God reassured you of His love for you.

We know and experience God's love for us in two ways: 1) through the Spirit's coming to dwell in us at conversion (v. 5), and 2) through Jesus' death for sinners on the cross (v. 8). Paul grounds our internal assurance of God's love in the external accomplishment of our redemption. The work of Christ on the cross and the Spirit's work in our hearts transcend our circumstances and tell us that God loves us. We interpret

our circumstances according to the gospel, not vice versa. We know God loves us because of what He did for us in Christ, not because our lives are easy.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18.

Rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks are three things we are to do at all times, no matter our circumstances. These commands further demonstrate the gospel's unshakable truth and God's unwavering love, things that aren't subject to or limited by our circumstances. We will always have something to rejoice in, pray about, and to be thankful for. Therefore, we can always obey these tasks because of what God has done in us through Christ.

Why are the disciplines mentioned above "God's will for you in Christ"?

What is encouraging about knowing this to be God's will for you in any given situation or context?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

In what areas of your life are you tempted to put your hope or trust? What makes you feel secure on a day-to-day basis? Where does your trust in people or things need to decrease and trusting in Christ need to increase?

What alerts you when you realize you are putting your faith in people or things other than Christ?

How might thinking more about your right standing with God through faith in Christ make you handle suffering better? How might it change the way you view your future?

PRAY

Read Psalm 100:4-5 out loud together. End by having each person pray a sentence prayer of one thing they are thankful for. If someone has never prayed aloud, this is a big deal, but also incredibly powerful.

COMMENTARY

ROMANS 5:1-5

5:1. When Paul used the term therefore, he was summarizing in a word the totality of his previous arguments made in 1:18–4:25. The only reasonable conclusion to make (and what God had revealed to Paul) was that believers are declared righteous by faith. Righteousness cannot be earned by any amount or duration of good works; it is received only as a gift through faith in Jesus Christ. For Paul, being declared right with God by faith opens a floodgate of divine grace in believers' lives.

First of all is the gift of peace with God. Peace through Christ brings an end to the divine wrath we faced because of our sins. Apart from this peace we would have no recourse and no hope standing before God in the judgment. Second, peace through Christ refers to the effective restoration of a loving relationship with our Creator. Our sinfulness broke that relationship. With the removal of sin's curse through Christ's atoning sacrifice, believers are reunited in purpose, favor, and fellowship with our God. Third, peace through Christ enables a new relationship among believers. Our alienation from God because of our sins also alienated us

from one another. In Christ, all barriers to unity and fellowship are effectively removed (see Eph. 2:14; Col. 3:12-14). Fourth, peace through Christ empowers believers to become agents of genuine peace in a strife-filled world (Matt. 5:9; Heb. 12:14; Jas. 3:18).

Paul declared that peace with God comes to believers through our Lord Jesus Christ. That is, Jesus is the Agent through whom we receive this amazing, multifaceted benefit. The name Lord connects Jesus with God's revelation of Himself as "Yahweh" in the Old Testament era (see for example, Ex. 3:13-15). Jesus is the Divine Sovereign. The names Jesus and Christ emphasize that the Lord is the Savior and the Promised Messiah. The pronoun our emphasizes the personal relationship believers have with God.

5:2. In addition to receiving peace with God through Christ, believers gain genuine hope that can withstand even the darkest times of trouble and affliction. God's grace is not just a one-time experience that comes and goes at conversion. Rather, in Christ we have obtained access into this grace in which we stand.

Paul wrote the Greek verb rendered we stand in a tense that communicates a completed (that is, perfected) action, the results of which continue in full force. Thus Paul declared that believers receive a complete supply of God's grace at conversion, yet its benefits keep on working in full force throughout our lives and in whatever situations we find ourselves. In particular, God's grace continually helps us stand strong in faith when we face life's trials (see 2 Cor. 12:8-9). Moreover, God's grace is sufficient to help us stand without fear before our Lord when He returns to claim His people (see 1 Pet. 1:13).

God's continuing grace thus gives us cause to rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Because His loving grace is permanent—not fleeting like the morning dew—the promises of redemption and glory cause us to rejoice. This kind of rejoicing has nothing to do with the boasting of the self-righteous. Rather, it is akin to boasting in the Lord and is an aspect of a believer's true worship (see Jer. 9:24; 1 Cor. 1:31; Gal. 6:14).

5:3-4. Christian joy runs deep and endures because its source is the ever-flowing stream of God's grace. This is why Paul could state that we as believers also rejoice in our afflictions. Paul's statement doesn't imply that we somehow enjoy suffering. Rather, it means that we have confidence God will use even our afflictions to bring about His good purposes in our lives. For this confidence we need look no further than the example of our Lord Jesus. He willingly bore the most horrendous pain and suffering with a view that His death and resurrection would open the way to our salvation (see Heb. 2:10; 12:2). Endurance is self-authenticating; we grow in endurance by staying the course of faith and not being swayed by trials (see Jas. 1:2-4). Proven character follows naturally from the believer who has remained faithful through trials. Enduring trials causes us to grow in faith, and such growth is a testimony of faith's authenticity.

5:5. Christian hope that emerges from the nourishing flow of God's grace in our lives will not disappoint us. It goes without saying that many a person's self-generated hope has been dashed by the brutal realities of life. Hope in God, however, is hope that endures forever. We can trust that God will fulfill His promises to the end. A Christian also can live with enduring hope because of the Holy Spirit who was given to us. The Holy Spirit is our indwelling Witness who testifies that God loves us. Paul further explained the work of the Holy Spirit in believers in chapter eight. Suffice it to say here that the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is a pledge, guaranteeing what will be ours as believers in the fullest measure in the age to come.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18

5:16. Paul admonished, Be joyful always. This is short and to the point. The key, however, is the word always. Paul meant this literally. Christian joy is not bound by circumstances or hindered by difficulties. In fact, joy in the New Testament is often coupled with sorrow or suffering.

The Thessalonian believers had already experienced this strange duet, like an inspiring song played in minor key (1 Thess. 1:6). When the sorrow or suffering results from being identified with Christ, the Holy Spirit creates a supernatural joy—a wellness of soul that cannot be dampened by adverse situations. The explanation may be found in 2 Corinthians 4:16–18: "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all."

5:17. The next staccato note follows: pray continually. This means never stop praying. Paul was a busy missionary, and he wrote about the Christian's duty to fulfill daily responsibilities, so this is not a command about speaking non-stop prayers. It refers, however, to the attitude of prayer, or reverence before God. The Christian's life of righteousness and his approach to relationships and responsibilities should be such that he maintains a constant attitude of being in God's presence. Such a person will pray often and about many things, including requests, praise, and thanksgiving. This command also means that we should never quit praying.

5:18. The next command requires trust in the sovereignty of Christ: give thanks in all circumstances. It

recognizes God's eminence in all events. A thankful spirit does not come naturally to most of us. Certainly it pushes us beyond our natural capacities when difficult or painful situations invade our life. This command to be thankful, no matter what happens, is possible only by God's grace. When we can agree with God that he works all things out for good to those who love him and are committed to obedience (Rom. 8:28), then we can thank him.