



Focus Points...*For Romans 5*

Listen...

- * As Paul “hits one out of the park” with a remarkable, clear and easy-to-understand explanation of God’s purpose for suffering in the lives of believers.

Prayer:

Lord, life can be very difficult. Though I know we live in a sinful world, Satan often discourages me. Especially in suffering, I doubt if You’re really there. I wonder what I did to deserve the suffering. As I read Romans 5, help me see Your purpose for my suffering: to strengthen and reaffirm me in Your boundless grace, love and mercy for me. In Your name I pray. Amen.

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Commentary:

Why do Christians suffer? Romans 5 provides one of the best answers to this question.

Reading through Romans, it appears that Paul—moved, guided and directed by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—is hitting “home runs” in virtually every chapter of his letter. Though the entire Bible is God’s “home run” of grace, Paul in his Letter to the Romans, “hits it out of the park” more often than in most other books in the Bible.

His first home run is in Romans 1:16. There Paul gave the classic description of the power of God’s Word as the power of salvation to those who believe. Paul hit another home run in Romans 3:20ff. There he described how we are all sinners saved only by faith in Jesus Christ. Paul hit another home run in Romans 4. By using Abraham as an example of faith, Paul showed that it was not circumcision that saved, but faith alone. Paul hit that one right out of the park...straight out to center field...and out of the park!

Paul continued his remarkable hitting streak in Romans 5. This home run, as others, stands tall as one of the most distinctive testimonies of how God works in our lives...through suffering.

Why do Christians suffer? The obvious answer is because of the consequences of sin in a fallen world.

When Christians ask this question, what they really want to know is the answer for the more perplexing question, “Why does God allow His children—me—to suffer?”

We can find many places in the Scriptures which answer this question. However, perhaps the best answer to this question is found in Romans 5.

Romans 5 begins with “Therefore.” Therefore answers the questions, “What’s the point of what was just said?” and “So how does that apply to me?”

Paul’s “therefore” in Romans 5:1 does two things.

First, it affirms that all of us—Jew, Gentile, male or female—are justified through faith, not circumcision.

Second, it affirms that those in Christ Jesus have complete peace with God “through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Our peace is not based on works. It is simply God’s undeserved gift to us. Because we are justified, God treats us “just-as-if-I’d” never sinned at all.

Most pastors and Christian counselors recognize that, in every dealing with Christians, these two affirmations must always be made first. In all of our dealings with other Christians, our encouragement to them in every circumstance—and I mean every—must begin with these two affirmations of God’s grace in them. These affirmations are the power of God unto salvation for them...and us...in every circumstance.

These affirmations are especially important when talking with other Christians about suffering. Without these two affirmations, Christians will think God has abandoned them, that they are not “good enough,” or that God is punishing them for some known or unknown reason.

These affirmations remind us of who we really are: children of God. We have the promise of grace. We have God’s unconditional promise of non-abandonment. He will never leave us...especially in times of suffering.

Christians often shun suffering and sometimes despise God for their suffering. According to Paul, suffering is not a cause for despondency. It’s cause for rejoicing!

“We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.” (5:3-5)

Why do Christians rejoice in suffering? Because they know that God uses suffering to build up our character. Suffering can wreak havoc on our body or earthly circumstances. But suffering, as God intends, also strengthens us. It

presses our perseverance, character and hope to “where no man has gone before.”

Suffering is not hard because of the pain which causes the suffering. Instead, the hardest part of suffering is to persevere enough to let God transform our character and lift our hope to new heights.

Nice home run, Paul!

Back to suffering! Does suffering really lift us to “Where no man has gone before?” Well, actually, no. There is One who has gone where no man could ever go. That was Jesus Christ.

Jesus was there long before us. The suffering He endured was much greater than any suffering we can experience. We can be certain that God uses suffering in our lives to build us up because of how God used Jesus’ suffering to save us.

The remainder of Romans 5 simply describes the blessings resulting from Jesus’ suffering. As you read through these verses, get ready for Paul to hit another one out of the ballpark...over and over again. We know Paul is having a “good day at the ball park” because Romans 5—and all of Romans and Scripture—centers on this, Paul’s greatest home run.

“While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him!” (5:8-9)

Because Jesus died for you, we are absolutely confident that God uses suffering to shape, strengthen and temper our character and hope. No, God will never, ever abandon us. If He died for us “while we were still sinners” (5:8), we know He is with us always, even to the end of the world (Matthew 28:19).

Prayer:

1. If thou but suffer God to guide thee,
and hope in God through all thy ways,
God will give strength, whate'er betide thee,
and bear thee through the evil days.
Who trusts in God's unchanging love
builds on the rock that naught can move.

2. Only be still, and wait God's leisure
in cheerful hope, with heart content
to take whate'er thy Maker's pleasure
and all-discerning love hath sent;
we know our inmost wants are known,
for we are called to be God's own.

3. Sing, pray, and keep God's ways unswerving;
so do thine own part faithfully,
and trust God's Word; though undeserving,
thou yet shalt find it true for thee.
God never yet forsook at need
the soul that trusted God indeed.

Hymn in the public domain
George Neumark, Translated by Catherine Winkworth

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