Session 4: Peace.How can we find rest in a stressful world?

Welcome to Session 4 of our teaching series on Romans. In this session you will find worship song suggestions, a sermon outline and a written prayer.

KEY VERSE:

'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.'

ROMANS 5.5 (NIV)

BIBLE READINGS:

Romans 5.1-5

MAIN QUESTION:

What difference does the gospel make to our lived experience, especially when we face suffering and challenges?

MAIN THEMES:

Peace, love, Holy Spirit, suffering, perseverance, hope.

Context:

Having explored the problem of sin and the good news of salvation, Paul now brings us to a place of rest, enjoying the peace and love of God, before we continue on our journey.

Summary:

Paul marvels at the wonder of the gospel; we can live in the certainty and security of knowing that we've been justified. We have peace with God, and access into his presence. And this is not just a factual or theoretical idea; we can experience God's love as a daily reality, sustaining us through trials and filling us with hope.

WORSHIP SONG SUGGESTIONS:

- · Same Song
- · Our God
- Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)
- · How Great Thou Art
- I Stand Amazed In The Presence
- I Speak Jesus
- It Is Well
- · King Of Kings

Reflections:

After four weighty chapters exploring the problem of sin, our inability to rescue ourselves, and the free gift of righteousness, Paul pauses and gives us a moment to take it all in. This chapter is a breath of fresh air, and preaching it should bring a real sense of relief and peace to the congregation.

By now I hope you feel, as Paul did, that you are 'not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes' (Romans 1.16). As you preach this passage, do so with confidence that the gospel is truly good news for tired and weary people. Make a confident appeal for people to begin following Jesus, and also consider making space for people to pray to receive a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit.

Although this talk looks at positive themes like peace, access to God, and assurance of his love, it is not naïve about the challenges of life. God never promises that our lives will be free from hardship, but he does promise to sustain us through it. So be mindful of people who are experiencing particular challenges right now, addressing them sensitively and offering them support and prayer.

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Suggested sermon outline

INTRODUCTION

Romans 5 is a place to pause, reflect on the journey so far, and refresh yourself for the rest of the journey ahead.

Do you have an anecdote/story to illustrate this idea? For example, a time when you were on an adventure or journey and stopped somewhere beautiful to catch your breath and refuel? Maybe you even have a photo to share. Make use of the mountain visual to show the point we have reached on the journey through Romans and why this is a moment to rest and take in the view! See more in *Romans: A Letter That Makes Sense of Life*, chapter 4.

ΕY	POINTS: TWO HARD TRUTHS	NOTES
1	Peace with God (Romans 5.1–2)	
-	Paul returns to the theme of justification, the result of which is that we now have peace with God. This is an opportunity to recap the journey so far. You may want to contrast the <i>pax Romana</i> (Roman Peace) with the peace Christ has achieved, not through shedding the blood of his enemies, but by shedding his own blood for his enemies (see Romans 5.10).	
-	The tenses used in verse 1 are important. We have been justified (past tense) so now we have peace (ongoing). We don't have to wait until the end of time to find out if we've been justified; we can know now that it has already happened. Help people to see how radical an idea this is. We can know now that we are justified. It is not a future decision, based on our performance. Justification is a gift we receive, not a wage that we earn. You may want to explore what life would be like if we couldn't be certain of our justification until the day of judgment. How would that affect the way we saw God? We might feel fearful of him, or constantly feel a need to prove ourselves to him. We would probably spend our whole lives feeling insecure, never certain if we'd done enough.	
-	Peace with God doesn't mean that he acquits us but has nothing more to do with us – like a judge letting us walk free and saying, 'I don't want to see you in here again.' Rather, God now gives us access to stand freely in his presence. Do you have an example of a time you were granted access into an important place, or given an audience with a powerful person? How did it make you feel? How much greater is it to have access to the living God? This idea of a God who desires	

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relationship with us is a bridge to the next point.

2	The love of God	(Romans 5.3–5)
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- The gospel does not only bring about a formal, legal change in our status, but it also brings us into a daily lived experience of God's love.
 - You may want to use the example of marriage. Someone can know they are married by pointing to a legal certificate, which proves the *objective* fact of their marriage. But there is also a *subjective* experience of love which a couple may experience daily. The combination of those two is powerful. For the Christian, we can know we're justified both by looking back to the cross, the testimony of Scripture and the moment we gave our lives to Jesus, but we can also look to the daily experience of God's love, poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (verse 5).
- The knowledge of our justification and the ongoing experience of God's love transform our experience of hardship. God doesn't promise us a life free from challenges, but he does promise us his presence with us in the challenges.
 - Often when we're walking through difficult times, the most helpful thing is having someone with us. They may not be able to change our circumstances, but they can bring us enormous comfort. Do you have an experience of this from your own life which you could share? Perhaps of another person giving you comfort? Or of how you have experienced comfort directly from God.
- Reflect on the words from verses 3–4, and consider whether it would be possible to say them were it not for the experience of God's love?
 - Without the experience of God's love, we might be angry at him or question his goodness. But the Spirit testifies that he loves and cares for us.
- Without the experience of God's love, we would be likely to give up. With the assurance of the Spirit, we persevere knowing that God is strong enough to defeat even sin and death.

Without the experience of God's love, we might slide into bitterness, envious of those who have an easier life, or experience any number of negative feelings. But the Spirit fills us with good fruit (Galatians 5.22–26) and helps us to develop character. Without the experience of God's love, we might despair. But the Spirit fills us with a deep hope. We will explore this more as we press on towards Romans 8.

NOTES

CONCLUSION

How do we live in the light of this?

Below are some suggested points of application. Feel free to select a couple of points which are most appropriate to your setting.

- Having presented the gospel over the last few weeks, this is a great opportunity to invite people to begin following Jesus. There is so much on offer: freedom from sin, the promise of eternal life, relationship with God, an experience of his love, peace that sustains us, and hope in the midst of trials.
- Write out your testimony, as a way of reflecting on how Jesus has changed your life. Try writing it in two halves: firstly, how did you become a Christian and what difference did it initially make? And secondly, how does your faith sustain and encourage you on a daily basis? Then, if you're feeling bold, find someone to share it with this week.
- Start every day by asking the Holy Spirit to fill you with a fresh awareness of God's love. You may find it helpful to sit quietly and breathe deeply, imagining the Spirit filling you. Thank God that you are free to enter his presence without fear.
- If you are going through a particularly challenging season, ask the Holy Spirit to help you develop resilience and character. You may want to read and reflect on Galatians 5.22–26, and ask the Holy Spirit for the particular character traits you need right now.



READING SUGGESTIONS:

- Romans: A Letter That Makes Sense of Life by Andrew Ollerton
- The Message of Romans by John Stott
- Romans 1–7 For You by Timothy Keller



WRITTEN PRAYER

'But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.'
ROMANS 5.8 (ESV)

Lord Jesus, these are such beautiful and reassuring words. While we had our backs turned away from you, when we were disinterested or indifferent, while we were separated from you by our sinful and selfish actions, you died for us. Thank you for taking my place and thank you for exchanging my sin for your righteousness. Thank you that I'm a child of God with full access to the Father and the blessing of the Holy Spirit.