

Companion for the Journey

March 8, 2026

Romans 5:1-11

¹ Therefore, since we have been made righteous through his faithfulness, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² We have access by faith into this grace in which we stand through him, and we boast in the hope of God's glory. ³ But not only that! We even take pride in our problems, because we know that trouble produces endurance, ⁴ endurance produces character, and character produces hope. ⁵ This hope doesn't put us to shame, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

⁶ While we were still weak, at the right moment, Christ died for ungodly people. ⁷ It isn't often that someone will die for a righteous person, though maybe someone might dare to die for a good person. ⁸ But God shows his love for us, because while we were still sinners Christ died for us. ⁹ So, now that we have been made righteous by his blood, we can be even more certain that we will be saved from God's wrath through him. ¹⁰ If we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son while we were still enemies, now that we have been reconciled, how much more certain is it that we will be saved by his life? ¹¹ And not only that: we even take pride in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, the one through whom we now have a restored relationship with God.

Psalm 95

¹ Come, let's sing out loud to the Lord! Let's raise a joyful shout to the rock of our salvation! ² Let's come before him with thanks! Let's shout songs of joy to him! ³ The Lord is a great God, the great king over all other gods. ⁴ The earth's depths are in his hands; the mountain heights belong to him; ⁵ the sea, which he made, is his along with the dry ground, which his own hands formed. ⁶ Come, let's worship and bow down! Let's kneel before the Lord, our maker! ⁷ He is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, the sheep in his hands...

If only you would listen to his voice right now! ⁸ “Don’t harden your hearts like you did at Meribah, like you did when you were at Massah, in the wilderness,” ⁹ when your ancestors tested me and scrutinized me, even though they had already seen my acts. ¹⁰ For forty years I despised that generation; I said, ‘These people have twisted hearts. They don’t know my ways.’ ¹¹ So in anger I swore: ‘They will never enter my place of rest!’”



As we begin this time together, a brief overview of this week’s scripture readings. First, today’s Old Testament reading. Psalm 95 is first a song of praise for God’s sustaining power and provision.

This was evident in the Israelite’s wilderness wanderings after being freed from slavery in Egypt. There is also a warning in the Psalm, reminiscent of the warning that we have heard consistently during this year’s Lenten journey: bad things happen when we turn away from God’s presence, guidance, direction, and provision.

In our reading from early in the week, from Exodus 17, God’s people were in the wilderness and there was no water. They complained to Moses – “*argued with*” are his words – and, by proxy, he thought they were testing God. God has already parted the sea, provided water once, and given the people manna then quail. Reflecting on this reading on Monday, I was reminded that we often complain or go to people that we think can help us in our time of need. For the Israelites, Moses was their conduit to God, their intercessor, their intermediary. God had demonstrated God’s love and care for the people again and again. It was natural for the people to turn to God through Moses. The people trusted that God would indeed help them in their time of need. God has again and again. This time, water flowed from the rock. As we walk in faith, this is also our experience with God. In turn, we grow in our trust of God.

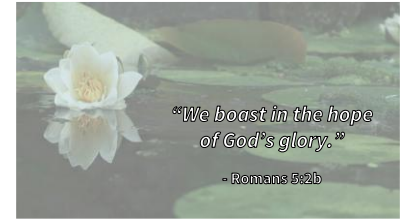
In our gospel reading for this week, we once again meet the Samaritan woman. In John 4, she meets Jesus at the well. The woman and Jesus are both thirsty. In this well-known parable, Jesus eventually offers the woman “*living water.*” As their conversation unfolds, she comes to know Jesus as the Messiah, as her Savior. The woman then brought many others to a saving faith in Jesus. He stayed with them for two days, teaching and welcoming many into a personal relationship with himself. The passage closes with the new believers saying to the woman, “*We have heard for ourselves and know that this one is truly the savior of the world.*” As we too share our Jesus experiences with others, they will be drawn to the Savior and will come to know a companion for their journey in this life of faith.

As we prepare to delve deeper into Romans 5 and Psalm 95 today, let us pray...

God of love, we are thirsty for you, thirsty for your love, your blessing, your provision, and your presence. We open ourselves to your grace — for you gush forth with the water of life. Renew us with your Word today. It is with this hope that I ask you, O God, to bless the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts. You are our rock and our redeemer, our Christ and our king. Amen.

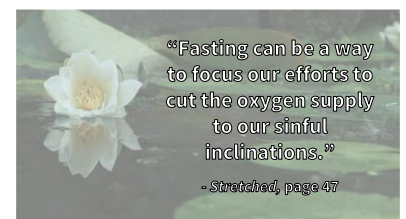
Please turn with me to Romans 5. Paul begins with two great reminders. In verse 1 he reminds us that since we have been made righteous through both God’s faithfulness to us and through our faith in Jesus, we have peace with God. Maybe better put, we find peace through God and our faith. Paul unpacks this idea much more in the middle of our passage. Continuing into verse 2, Paul reminds us that our companion for this journey also brings grace into our lives. This grace that we receive by faith allows us to “*stand through him.*” In the trials and hardships of life, by God’s grace we are sustained, comforted, cared for.

At the end of verse 2 we read these words: “*We boast in the hope of God’s glory.*” Before wrestling with the word “*boast,*” let us unpack this hope that we find through our faith. For Paul and for his audience, hope was not really so much about the future as it was about the present. Hope can be our present reality too, even in hard times. In the here and now, we can hope and trust in what is present but unseen. With hope and trust, we can know that because of God’s grace, what we’re doing or experiencing is worth it in the long run. Even when we’re hurting or suffering, trusting and hoping in the mystery of grace can turn our suffering or present difficulty into the soil of hope.



Now, boasting. Our first reaction to this word is negative. The same goes for Paul’s admonition to “*take pride*” in the next verse. The original Greek word, *kauchaomai*, has both good and bad connotations. We’re just used to the bad connotations. To boast or to be prideful can be to seek to glorify self, to have others notice us or our efforts. We live in a culture that often seeks to glorify the individual and their personal success. We find a way to counter or combat this temptation in our Lenten book, *Stretched*. Chapter 2 deals with the ancient spiritual discipline of fasting.

Whether a self-chosen fast or a God-imposed fast, author Christopher Richmann notes that fasting can “bring the flesh into subjection to the spirit.” In this way, a fast can reinforce our dependence on God, lessening our dependence on self. In addition, Richmann adds, “Fasting can be a way to focus our efforts to cut the oxygen supply to our sinful inclinations.” Through the practice or discipline of fasting, one can be better prepared to fend off the temptations or “sinful inclinations” that are so common to humankind.

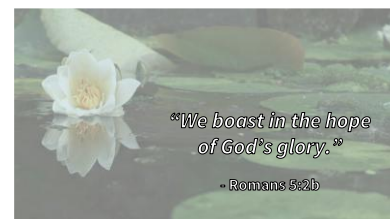


To deepen our relationship with and connection to God is to lessen our tendencies to elevate or glorify self. More on the discipline of fasting as we pick up on the ideas of suffering later in the message.

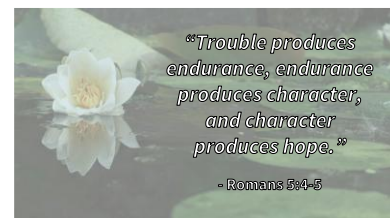
There are also good connotations for boasting and pride. These align better with what Paul was originally trying to communicate.

Correctly read, Paul is really inviting his audience and us today to

have confidence in God or even to rejoice in God's presence in the midst of our difficulties in this life. Here Paul is reminding us that we are not alone on this journey of faith or on our journey through this life. We have a companion as we journey through life. This idea is countercultural, especially in our time. We live in a time that champions individualism and, therefore, tends to isolate us from one another. To emphasize the companionship and communal aspects of our faith stands counter to society's focus on the individual. But this has been a part of our faith since the days that Jesus walked this earth.



Nowhere is the community of faith more important than in the difficulties of life. While we often prefer to suffer or grieve alone, this is not God's intent for us. Paul speaks into the communal nature of our faith during hard times. It is hard to imagine the results that Paul describes if our choice is to go it alone during our *"troubles,"* as Paul puts it. In verses 3 and 4 Paul lays out this positive potential outcome from our times of trouble: *"Trouble produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope."* Endurance, perhaps, is relational and communal. Character and hope definitely are relational and communal in nature.

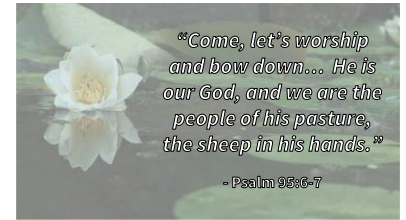


Yes, there is an individual component to character, but the real test of character comes in the ways that we interact with others. How we treat others in times of suffering reveals our true character. In hard times, do we have a genuine love for one another? Do we make the time to be there for one another in moments of need? Are we more concerned about being present and doing what we can for each other than we are about our own wants and needs? And when we are the one in need, are we receptive and gracious and grateful for those who show up and love us and care for us? Put more plainly, do we act and treat one another as the community of faith should act and treat one another – with love and grace and mercy and generosity...? When we are being to one another as Christ would be to us, it is then that we find hope in the community of faith.

There are times in our walks of faith that we experience the results of a troubling time leading to the practice of endurance and then to building our character and lastly to a place of hope. In the times of trial, our faith is often tested. When we look back on these times, we can almost always see how our faith grew and proved its strength. In *Stretched*, writer Christopher Richmann puts it this way on page 55: “You may not feel that your faith increases right away, but God plays the long game in these things, and faith works its power quite apart from your feelings.” Even though we may feel defeated or may question why we had to go through something at the time, God’s power is always at work in us.

Turning to Psalm 95, we enter into the psalmist’s celebration of a time when God was present to Israel. The Psalm begins with a call to sing and to shout out a joyful praise. The author declares that God is above the whole earth and above all other gods. He or she states that the depths of the earth are in God’s hands. The psalmist adds that the mountains and the seas are formed by God’s own hands. This is a celebration of God’s presence in all creation.

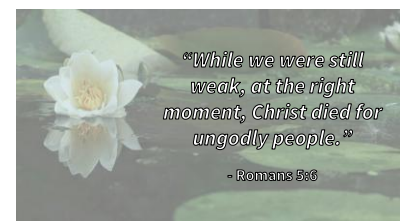
In verses 6 and 7 the psalmist proclaims, *“Come, let’s worship and bow down... He is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, the sheep in his hands.”* This is a call to worship and to live in right relationship with our God that permeates all of creation as well as our very being. We belong to our God. And our God cares for us personally, as a shepherd cares for each sheep in the flock. These words evoke feelings of security and safety, of belonging and community, of provision and protection. These are good words to remember when we find ourselves in times of trouble, in dark valleys.



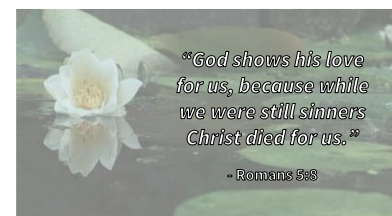
But we don’t always remember these words, do we? We don’t always turn to God in our times of need. Sometimes that culturally taught rugged individualism kicks in. Sometimes it is our pride – in the bad sense of the word. Sometimes it is our stubbornness or our fear of showing our emotions to others, becoming vulnerable. In these moments, we think that we do not need any companion for our journey. Harkening back to the Israelites’ time in the wilderness, to one of the times that they argued with Moses and tested God, the psalmist writes, *“If only you would listen to his voice right now! Don’t harden your hearts like you did at Meribah.”* The warning then comes at the end of the Psalm: *“They will never enter my place of rest.”* Hardened hearts keep us out of God’s presence too.



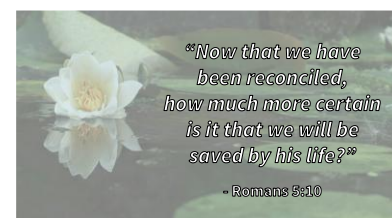
Paul also addresses our hardness of heart – although in a very different way. In verse 5 Paul writes, *“While we were still weak, at the right moment, Christ died for ungodly people.”* While we were weak – that’s one of Paul’s ways of saying, “When we were lost in our sin...”



Instead of being denied entry into God’s presence because of our hardened, sinful hearts, God allowed his son to die for our sake so that we could still be in God’s presence. God reached beyond the hardened hearts to gather us back up and to reconcile us so that we could be in right relationship with God. Then, in verse 8, Paul explains why God would extend such grace, mercy, and forgiveness to us. Here he writes, *“God shows his love for us, because while we were still sinners Christ died for us.”* Love, my friends, that is why God reached beyond our brokenness and sinfulness to bring us back into relationship with God. The love that God has for you and for me and for all of us is an amazing love. In this verse, I am reminded of these words from last week: *“For God so loved the world…”*



Near the end of our Romans passage, Paul reminds us of the hope that we have from our friend and companion for the journey, Jesus Christ. In verse 10, the apostle writes, *“Now that we have been reconciled, how much more certain is it that we will be saved by his life?”* I believe that I can answer that question. Brothers and sisters in Christ, yes, it is certain that since we have been made right with God, we will be saved. We are saved as we endure the trials and troubles of this life and we will be saved into eternal life when this journey is over. And then, beloved of Christ, we will join our companion for this journey for our time in eternity. This is the hope of our faith. Thanks be to God. Alleluia and amen.



Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. What object, image, or memory serves you as a reminder of God's love and faithfulness? How does remembering this strengthen your faith and trust?
- 2) *Pray*. Someone you know needs 'water from a rock,' healing, comfort, strength... Spend some time each day this week in prayer for this person.
- 3) *Study*. Read Exodus 17:8-16. How does this story reinforce the idea that we need to be there for one another just as God is there for us always? Where could you put an action like this into actual practice?