

Prov. 8:1–4, 22–31

Ps. 8

Rom. 5:1–5

John 16:12–15

Awash in the Gifts of God

**Goal for
the Session**

Youth will express hope in the promise of God’s faithfulness and love.

■ P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E S E S S I O N

Focus on Romans 5:1–5

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Margaret P. Aymer

Through Jesus Christ, the Roman church has peace with God and access into the grace of God. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, it also has had the love of God poured into the hearts of its members. All of this underscores that the affliction or oppression of the Roman church is not the result of divine displeasure and should not, therefore, cause the Roman church shame. Rather, all evidence to the contrary, the church is awash in the gifts of God and, despite its affliction or oppression, is filled with divine favor and love.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Linda E. Thomas

Paul tells the believers in Rome that because they believe that Jesus is the Son of God, God brings them to a place of highest privilege and they stand there presently. So whatever their place or station in life, in whatever circumstance they find themselves, they can rest assured that God gives them special honor and freedom now. Because of this, they can boldly and merrily anticipate developing into the complete person God always intends for them and for us to be. Following Paul’s message to the Romans means that becoming all God intends for us to be begins *now*. This too is part of the real peace we have with God.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Michael Jenkins

Paul does not say that whenever the world breaks us, we will inevitably heal back stronger. It is simply not true. Some who suffer are broken for good, and they do not get well again. Paul is no magician, nor does he advocate a simpleminded optimism. What Paul does promise is that our suffering need never be wasted. Because we belong to God in Christ, because God has poured his love into our hearts, that which we suffer can produce patient endurance. This endurance can form the character of the God who gives God’s self away for us all, and this character produces hope, hope that will never disappoint because God is more faithful than we can ever imagine.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Richard L. Sheffield

Hope is not just the result of “being hopeful,” or “wishful thinking,” or how much we hurt. Hope happens because—as Paul wrote, again about suffering—“we know that all things work together for good for those who love God” (Rom. 8:28), even bad things like suffering and pain. Hope is not something we “work out” but something we take in. “And hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (5:5). Our faith (endurance and character) and God’s love, freely given, are the substance of hope.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE
Romans 5:1–5

Focus on Your Teaching

Youth face many fluctuations in their self-esteem as they navigate through the many landscapes of change during adolescence. Younger teens often feel anxiety over personal identity while older teens have usually attained greater emotional stability. Young people can have high ideals, yet this idealism can be put to the test in the face of personal and global challenges. When they encounter suffering and injustice, they need adults who can affirm the hope that can sustain them in troubled times.

O God, may my confidence and hope be grounded deeply in you, so that I can witness to your faithfulness and love. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- tealights and stones (one per person)
- matches
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- different colors of felt-tipped markers

For Responding:

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2
- option 3: card stock, art supplies, craft supplies (optional)

For Word Connection:

- Internet-connected device

Romans is not easy for young people to understand. Paraphrases in contemporary language can help, and youth can benefit from several different translations.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, gather quotes from the Internet that speak about connection with God—such as www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/relationship-with-god—and print these on small pieces of paper.

Greet youth as they arrive and ask them to participate in a “best thing/worst thing” ritual. Have them each name the thing from the past week for which they are most grateful, and the thing that was most challenging or hurtful. For each “best thing” named, the person lights a tealight and for each “worst thing,” the person places a stone beside the candle. After all have spoken, spend a few moments in silence. Then invite conversation as needed about these situations. Ask:

✠ Where or how do you find help and support during the “worst times” of life?

Explain that this week’s Bible reading talks about getting through tough times. Pray:

O God, by your Spirit, join us together around your holy Word. Speak to our hearts and empower our lives to do what you ask of us. Amen.

EXPLORING

Help youth find the “letters” section of the New Testament in their Bibles, noticing that the first letter is written to the church in Rome. Explain that the apostle Paul wrote the letter to introduce himself to the followers of Christ in Rome and to explain what it means to live a life of faith, especially during difficult times.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Right Relationship with God) and felt-tipped markers. Ask youth to read through the paraphrase based on Romans 5:1–5 one or more times. Then ask them to follow the instructions at the bottom of the page for exploring the themes and message of the reading. When everyone is finished, spend some time in pairs or as a whole group comparing choices and naming the key themes and message that youth have chosen.

Then have youth look at Romans 5:1–5 in their Bibles. Ask:

✧ How does Paul describe God’s relationship with God’s people?

In Romans 5:2, Paul talks about what Jesus does for his followers to help them connect with God. Some translations say “obtained access,” others say “introduced.” According to William Barclay, a well-known New Testament interpreter, the word Paul uses also means a harbor, or safe haven. If we try to rely on our own efforts to navigate through life, we will be like sailors fighting wild seas. But Jesus helps us to find the safe haven of God’s love when we trust what God can do for us. Look again at verses 3–5. Ask:

✧ What does Paul say about the Holy Spirit in verse 5?

Option: Have youth find Luke 24:49 and explain that “the one my Father has promised” is the Holy Spirit.

Part of Paul’s teaching in Romans is that the Holy Spirit is present in the lives of Jesus’ followers. This is something that Jesus had promised in one of his last conversations with his followers after the resurrection. Discuss:

✧ What is your understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit?

Comment that people react to difficult or challenging situations in different ways; some feel overwhelmed while others find strength to deal with them. Ask:

✧ According to Paul, what is the connection between suffering and hope?

Ask youth to think of the “worst things” that were named in the gathering ritual, as well as some of the personal challenges they have faced. Ask:

✧ What does Paul’s message say to you about hope and about God?

✧ How might Paul’s message of hope in God offer help to you during your worst times?
How can you offer that message of hope to others?

**EASY
PREP**

Option: Instead of, or as well as, Individual reflection, these situations could also be discussed as a group activity.

RESPONDING

Choose one of the following learning activities:

- 1. Reflecting on Hope** Youth will explore the promise of hope in their everyday lives. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Hope in Troubled Times) and ask youth to do some private reflection on the situations. Then have them look at the list of phrases (based on Romans 5:1–5). Beside each situation, in the space provided, ask them to write the number of a promise from Romans that they think could help support them and help them decide what to do in that situation. (Hint: There may be more than one promise that could help you in each situation.) Encourage them to also think of the situations of other people and how they might apply the promises.
- 2. Drama** Youth will express their hope in the promise of God’s support in difficult times by role-playing some of the challenging situations in which youth can find themselves. Brainstorm together some of the things that are challenging for teenagers today. These might be situations they have witnessed at home, school, or in the community, or stories that they have heard. Have them work together in pairs or small groups to create short plays portraying the situations and ways in which their hope and confidence in

If possible, youth could be responsible for mailing or delivering the cards, in consultation with the pastoral care team.

God can help them meet the challenges head on. Challenge the youth to perform their skits for other groups in the congregation and encourage others to claim hope in God.

- 3. Hope Cards** Youth will express their hope in the promise of God’s faithfulness and love by making cards to be distributed by members of the pastoral care team and your congregation’s pastor(s). Distribute card stock and art supplies and invite youth to design cards based on the word “Hope” that could be given to those in the congregation who are ill or going through other difficult times. Youth might include phrases from the Romans 5 reading.

CLOSING

Place the quotations you have collected on a table and explain that these are quotations about God from modern poets and writers. Ask youth to circle the table and read these words of wisdom. Invite them to choose one quote each, one that really speaks to them, and to sit with it for a few minutes. Ask:

- ✪ What do you like about this quote?
- ✪ What does it say to you about your connection with God?

If desired, invite those who wish to read aloud their chosen quotations and say something about them. Encourage youth to take their quotations home.

Close with the following blessing:

Remember: you are always held in the wide space of God’s grace. Keep hoping and trusting, because no matter what happens, God’s love is always flooding your heart. Amen!

■ ENHANCEMENT

WORD CONNECTION

Everyone goes through difficult days and it is sometimes very hard to keep going. Spoken-word artist Shane Koyczan offers a poem called “Instructions for a Bad Day.” Watch the video together, noting the advice Shane offers. His “instructions” encourage people to let go of anger, fear, and despair and reach out for support. Ask:

- ✪ In what ways are these instructions similar to Paul’s advice to the Roman Christians?

At one point Shane states that, “Hope is not enough.” Ask:

- ✪ Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
- ✪ What do you think Paul would say to Shane?

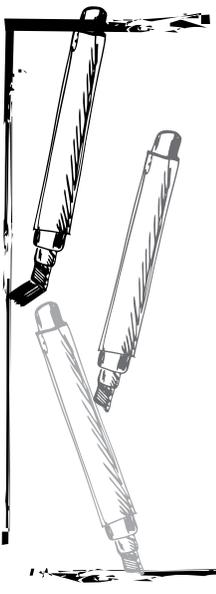
Instructions for a Bad Day: bit.ly/SKBadDay

Right Relationship with God

Since then it is by faith that we are justified, let us grasp the fact that we *have* peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him, we have confidently entered into this new relationship of grace, and here we take our stand, in the happy certainty of the glorious things he has for us in the future.

This doesn't mean, of course, that we have only a hope of future joys—we can be full of joy here and now even in our trials and troubles. Taken in the right spirit these very things will give us patient endurance; this in turn will develop a mature character, and a character of this sort produces a steady hope, a hope that will never disappoint us. Already we have some experience of the love of God flooding through our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us.

Romans 5:1–5, taken from *The New Testament in Modern English* by J. B. Phillips



Investigating the message

1. Use one color of felt marker to underline all the words and phrases that describe the gifts that we have been given through Jesus Christ.
2. Use another color of felt-tipped marker to circle the word “hope” wherever it is used.
3. Use a third color of felt-tipped marker to draw a rectangle around all the phrases that say what “having hope” means.
4. Try to sum up the message of these five verses into five words and write it below:

Hope in Troubled Times

H O P E

When the classical music composer Beethoven started to become deaf, one of the most horrible things that could happen to a musician, he said: “I will grab life by the throat; it shall surely never overcome me.” Paul writes about this same kind of hope in the reading from Romans 5:1–5.

The Situations . . .

- _____ Recently at school your best friend has deserted you to be with the popular group. Now you’re sitting at a lunch table all by yourself.
- _____ On your way home from a friend’s house you notice that the neighbor’s cat has been killed and is lying at the edge of the road. You want to just go home and say nothing because you know how sad your neighbors will be to hear this news.
- _____ You’re nervous about the tryouts for soccer on the weekend. You’re desperate to get onto a certain team but not sure that you are good enough.
- _____ Your friend plays some new music he just downloaded. You think the lyrics are disgusting and demeaning and you don’t want to listen. But you also don’t want to criticize your friend or make a scene.
- _____ The daughter of family friends had a terrible accident. She is paralyzed from the neck down and is in a rehabilitation hospital. You want to visit but you’re afraid, worried that you won’t know what to say.

The Promises . . .

1. Depend on what God has done for you, not what you can do for yourself.
2. Be confident of your relationship with God.
3. Troubles can help us develop endurance.
4. Endurance can help us develop character.
5. Hope helps us meet things head on and overcome them.
6. Hope in God doesn’t disappoint.