

When in Rome..?

Session 3: Reliable Hope

Timing: 30-45 minutes, then leading into ministry

Buzz groups: Suggestions are boxed, pairs or groups of 3-4 will work best

Illustrations: Suggestions are noted, but your own ideas and stories are preferable

Focus: Major on the one or two points most relevant to your group

Icebreaker: Tell the person next to you what the high point of your day so far was?

Introduction to the series

People often think of a journey through Romans as a trek in the Himalayas, or a visit to the Louvre Musee, Paris. In each session we'll go to some of the peak/masterpiece passages. We behave out of what we believe to be true. But are all our own beliefs correct? Is "our truth" *the truth*? In Romans Paul helps us review that. And with changed understanding, we adopt changed attitudes and new behaviours. We become more like Jesus.

Introduce Session 3

Romans 5:1-5 ¹Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. ³Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

Our faith in Jesus means that we have relationship with the most loving God and we experience His love by the Holy Spirit. Understanding this leads to changed attitudes and behaviours.

Buzz groups: Think of the person who loves you the most. How does your experience of life differ because of their love for you? What would life be like without it?

In these verses there's 5 changes to our lives that result from being justified by faith in Jesus: [NB. focus on two or three, and move through the others more quickly].

1. Peace

"Therefore...we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"

The Point: We're declared innocent even though we should be condemned as guilty ["justified" = "just-as-if-I'd" never sinned. We have peace with God.

Peace will provide true quality of life – less anxiety, better sleep, less anger and frustration, less depression, clearer thinking. *Illustrate the impact of Gods peace in your own life.*

2. Grace

“Therefore...we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.”

The Point: Grace is “God’s free and unmerited favour”. So if we have faith in Jesus we’ve got this too. “We have gained access” means it has been accomplished by Jesus for us.

Ask yourself what difference your “state of grace” before God really makes. Share a personal example, for example: guilt-free living, confidence therefore no intimidation, security therefore no insecurity.

3. Joy and Hope

“And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.”

The Point: The object of our hope is the glory of God. We now see it only in part. But we’ll know it in all its fullness in heaven.

Buzz groups: What does God’s glory refer to? What is it? What difference does it make to you?

According to verse 21 the answer is: (i) that Jesus Christ will appear; (ii) we’ll be changed into the full glory of what we were created to be; and (iii) the universe / creation will be renewed.

Application: Write down what you hope for in the future (short, medium and long-term)?

4. Perseverance and Character

³*Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;* ⁴*perseverance, character; and character, hope.*

The Point: God wants to mature us, even when life hurts.

- “Rejoice” is not pleasure in pain but at the divine purposes/rationale in suffering
- “suffering is the best context in which to be assured of God’s love. Many people will immediately assert the contrary, since it is suffering which makes them doubt God” (J.Stott)
- It’s a choice whether to persevere or give up/resign yourself to failure
- Character is the fruit of the Spirit that God grows in us (Gal 5:22-3)
- By persevering through suffering we can become more like Jesus.

Illustration: Share a personal example of when you persevered through a difficult time, and rejoiced not just because it ended, but also because your character and sense of hope improved as a result.

Buzzgroups: When life gets tough, what things help us to persevere, and help our character to be shaped in positive ways?

5. Love that delivers

⁵*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.*

The Point: Hope is anchored in God's steadfast love for us

- We all need love. *Illustrate with a cultural reference (e.g. song lyrics, a press story, or quote).*
- Parental love is widely regarded as essential for children's healthy emotional development. A spouse's or peer's love promotes our fulfillment. But God's love surpasses all of those.
- "In alert expectancy...we're never left feeling shortchanged. Quite the contrary – we can't round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit" (*The Message* translation of Romans 5)
- "Such hope is no fantasy" (Revised English Bible translation of "hope does not disappoint us")

We can be sure that God loves us by receiving his Holy Spirit.

- The Holy Spirit is God's gift to all believers
- The Holy Spirit pours God's love into our hearts

Illustration: To encourage others, share a story in your own life about a hopeless situation that was turned around by God's love.

Ideas for Ministry

Ask the Holy Spirit to:

- Show everyone Jesus' words in Luke 11:9-13 by repeating v13. Then pray and ask Him for the Holy Spirit.
- Help the group to anchor their hope in God's love
- Ask the Holy Spirit to bring revelation and to encourage each person. Pray into any words or pictures before splitting into the same pairs as earlier to pray into each other's hopes. Listen to what God ("the God of hope" – Romans 15:13) might be saying in response.