

Romans Chapters 4-6: Grace Transforms Suffering

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on Romans

In Romans 5:1–11 Paul offers more encouragement by reminding the Romans that *through* Christ we have *already* “gained access” to God’s “grace in which we stand” (Rom. 5:2). Grace signifies God’s life-giving power that raised Jesus from the dead. Grace continues to bring new and more abundant life into the world to and through Christ’s followers. By living *Christ’s* obedient life of faith and faithfulness in our own circumstances, we experience God’s life-giving grace that can bring us joy and peace at work, at home, and in every context of life.

Nevertheless, trusting the grace of God often calls for steadfast patience in the face of many challenges. Just as Christ suffered in the course of his obedience to God, we too may experience suffering when we embody Christ’s life of faith and faithfulness. Paul even says he “boasts” in his suffering (Rom. 5:3), knowing that his suffering is a participation in the suffering Jesus experienced in his mission to reconcile the world to God. Moreover, suffering often brings growth.

Therefore God does not promise that life and work will be happy for believers all the time. Many people suffer at work. Work can be boring, degrading, humiliating, exhausting, and heartless. We can be underpaid, endangered, and discriminated against. We can be pressured to violate our consciences and God’s principles. We can be fired, laid off, made redundant, downsized, terminated, unemployed or underemployed for long periods. We can bring suffering on ourselves by our own arrogance, carelessness, incompetence, greed, or malice against others. We can suffer even in good jobs. We should never be content with abuse or mistreatment at work, but when we have to endure suffering at work, all is not lost. God’s grace is poured out on us when we suffer, and it makes us stronger if we remain faithful.

Grace empowers us to remain faithful and hopeful even when the employer for whom we work closes their doors during hard economic times. So, too, God’s life-giving power sustains many highly educated young adults who still have trouble finding meaningful employment. Grace also inspires a team to persevere in developing a new product, even after repeated failures, knowing that what they learn by failing is what makes the product better.

God’s love sustains us through all kinds of suffering in life and work.