

## Title: “Getting Up When Life Gets You Down”

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Romans 5:1-11

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**Service Readings:** Gen 17:1-7, 15-16, Romans 5:1-11, Mark 8:27-38

*Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God. But this is not a promise for a pain-free life. How do we view suffering? How do we respond to it? How do we live through it?*

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Most of us are familiar with the Rocky movies from the late 1900s. A small-time boxer named Rocky Balboa who knows his worth, and finds a trainer who also believes in him. He quickly rises to World Heavyweight Champion and the story continues from there. By the six installment, released in 2006, it is clear that Rocky's life never got any easier. Sure, he had achieved his professional goals but he had also lost his trainer, Mickey from a heart attack, his wife has passed away, his son has grown and is distant, and he spends his time retelling old stories to customers in a small restaurant he owns. In one scene his son confronts him, blames him for the failures in his own life, and even places part of the blame on his association with his family's last name (which is famous). Rocky responds with this speech:

*“Let me tell you something you already know. The world ain't all sunshine and rainbows. It's a very mean and nasty place and I don't care how tough you are, it will beat you to your knees and keep you there permanently if you let it. You, me, or nobody is gonna hit as hard as life. But it ain't about how hard ya hit. It's about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward. How much you can take and keep moving forward. That's how winning is done!”*

It is a pivotal point in the development of his son, because he finally realizes that life isn't about what is easy, what is safe, and even what is owed him. Life is hard. Life is difficult. But that hard, difficult life is a life worth living. And winning is achieved not by escaping these challenges but by facing them and living *through* them. It is a very powerful pep talk with a very powerful message. And even though the message is worldly, it comes close to Paul's message to the Roman church. Listen again to the passage we just read, for it reads like a similar pep-talk to that congregation:

5 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup>Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup>Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup>and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup>and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

<sup>6</sup>For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup>For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die — <sup>8</sup>but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup>Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup>For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. <sup>11</sup>More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Paul's message is eerily similar to Rocky's: life is hard and life is dangerous, especially when we are associated with Jesus. But we not to fold and surrender but take the punches and rejoice in that suffering. We are to persevere because through the suffering our character will be built, and through that character we will come to better know the suffering Jesus endured on our behalf. And in faith we will come to trust that his work has earned for us eternal life. This is Paul's pep talk and it too is a powerful one. The only difference in the two authors, of course, is where we find our strength to keep moving forward. And this is the difference that makes *all the difference*!

The world is not all sunshine and rainbows. Suffering exists all throughout all the world, but is most acute in our individual lives. And where Rocky draws his strength is from within himself. *"It's about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward. How much you can take and keep moving forward."* You see, winning for him is finding within himself the strength to get up after life has beat him down. And that may sound good on the big screen but it is unattainable in real life. Sure, there are some things that man can stand against but there will always be that one event, that one loss that he will be unable to face. And then what? Where does he turn for strength? His only source has been depleted, has been defeated. What then? You see, he can only keep moving forward if he still has strength left after being knocked down. But we all know that life doesn't play fair. It will beat him down and beat us down with all the power *it* has, not just all the power we have! And so, just like Rocky, there will come a day when we will not have the strength to keep moving forward. And at that point, we will have failed ourselves.

Paul knew all this. He knew that we would never be able to face our sufferings, especially those that came from being followers of Christ, if we were to rely on our strength alone. And so he places our suffering in the context of Jesus – the source from where we can find the strength to keep moving forward. We can find our strength in God, he says, not because he is all powerful or all knowing. Sure, in our good times that might be enough for our confidence. But as we lay on the ground, beaten and wounded, just knowing that isn't going to be enough. And so Paul reminds us that God is not just a "good and loving" God. No, he sent his son into this world and subjected him to greater evil, suffering, and pain than we will ever imagine. And he did it for our benefit. And so, when we find ourselves beaten we can look to the cross and know that Jesus willingly subjected himself to something far worse so that we could have confidence in knowing that what we are experiencing is under the control of a God who loves us, who cares deeply for us, and *who understands our pain*. And this gives us the strength to get up and keep moving forward – because we know that our strength comes not from within ourselves but from God, himself.

And so, maybe if Paul were alive today, and if he had watched this Rocky movie, he would write to us this speech:

*"Let me tell you something you already know. The world ain't all sunshine and rainbows. It's a very mean and nasty place, filled with sin and corruption. I don't care how tough you are, it will beat you to your knees and keep you there permanently if you let it. You, me, or nobody is gonna hit as hard as life or be more cunning than Satan. But it ain't about how strong you are inside. It's about how tight you cling to the strength of God. For while you were still weak, sinfull, and an unrighteous, Christ died for you. He suffered separation from the Father so that you would never have to experience it. He poured out his blood and sacrificed his body so that you would have hope of eternal life. And after it was finished, after he defeated death and sin, he didn't leave you but rose again in a sign of strength – strength that you can cling to when you are face down in life. You see, while we were still enemies with God, he sent his son to die for us. And his son still comes to us, still offers us his body and blood to strengthen and preserve us. And so knowing that we are reconciled, knowing that we have eternal life, knowing that we have strength through the one that understands and loves us, rejoice! Rejoice for his strength is now your strength for he is alive in you. Get up and keep moving forward, for that is how winning in God's kingdom is done!"*

Maybe they'll put that the next Rocky film. I won't hold my breath.

Please pray with me.

Heavenly Father, thank you for your love and grace. You have reconciled us to yourself through the death of your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us to live in the hope of your glory, and to rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that they produce perseverance, character, and hope. May your love be poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, so that we can overcome any challenge we face.  
Amen.