

March 8, 2026 Romans 5:1-5

There's a ridiculous story going around about a man trying to cross the street. However, when he steps off the curb a car comes screaming around the corner and heads straight for him. The man walks faster, trying to hurry across the street, but the car changes lanes and is still coming at him. So the guy turns around to go back, but the car changes lanes again and is still coming at him. By now, the car is so close and the man so scared that he just stops in the middle of the road.

The car gets real close, then swerves at the last possible moment and stops next to the man. The driver rolls down the window. Lo and behold, it's a squirrel driving the car. And the squirrel says to the man, "See, it's not as easy as it looks, is it?"

Well, it's not easy. No matter how fortunate any of us may feel and how virtuous we are, there comes a time when our luck runs out and life slams us in the face. At such times we feel like a squirrel trying to cross a busy street and it seems like there is nowhere left to turn. Some of you have already been through such times. Others of us don't like to think about it, but we know our time is coming.

St. Paul deals specifically with life's difficult situations in our lesson for the day from Romans: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God."

Now, pay particular attention to these words, "**Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.**"

What a remarkable statement: "we glory in our sufferings." How can we possibly do that--glory in our sufferings? Sufferings hurt. Sufferings are inconvenient. Some of us spend our lives trying to avoid suffering. This is a good time to talk about the role of suffering in our lives.

First of all, St. Paul is saying that bad times are not designed to destroy us but to make us stronger. All of our struggles in life are designed not to defeat us, but to make us stronger. Problems are not stop signs, they are guidelines to direct our lives.

God His people to keep moving forward when life strikes us a blow. That is how we become stronger. That is how we build up the spiritual resources we need to successfully deal with life. **Bad times are not designed to destroy us but to make us stronger.**

Times of adversity also make us wiser. They help us take stock of our lives and make changes that can propel us forward. As St. Paul writes, "**Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.**"

There have been many people who have discovered that a time of pain, adversity or suffering marked a turning point in their life . . . for the better. **A time of adversity or suffering should always be a time of emotional and spiritual growth.**

St. Paul writes, "Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." Knowing that you have been in difficult times before can increase your odds of surviving later even more difficult situations.

The story is told of a Sunday class that was asked the question, "In your time of discouragement, what is your favorite Scripture?"

A young man said, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Psalm 23:1."

A middle age woman said, "God is my refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Psalm 46:1."

Another woman said, "In this world you shall have tribulations, but be of good cheer, I have overcome this world. John 16:33."

Then Mr. John, who was 80 years old . . . stood up and said with as much strength as he could muster, "and it came to pass 85 times in the Bible."

The class started to laugh a little thinking that old Mr. John's memory was starting to fail. When the laughing stopped, he said:

At 30 I lost my job with six hungry children and a wife to feed. I didn't know how I would make it.

At 40 my eldest son was killed overseas in the war. It knocked me down.

At 50 my house burned to the ground. Nothing was saved out of the house.

At 60 my wife of 40 years got cancer. It slowly ate away at her. We cried together many a night on our knees in prayer.

At 65 she died. I still miss her today.

“The pain I went through in each of these situations was unbelievable. I wondered where God was. But each time I looked in the Bible I saw one of those 85 verses that said, ‘and it came to pass.’ I felt that God was telling me, my pain and my circumstances were also going to pass and that God would get me through it.” Then he said, “And it came to pass.”

That’s an important lesson to learn. We can endure more than we think we can. With God’s help we will survive. Of course, for some of us, this truth will not be real until we actually go through a difficult time. Then we will know for certain that with God’s help we can make it through terrible storms, and we will be better people for it. “Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

You could make a very good case for the proposition that without difficulties in our life, **we would remain spiritual and emotional infants. You could make a convincing case that parents who make life too easy for their children do them a great disservice. In a sense they are stunting their growth. We learn our greatest lessons and experience our greatest growth during times of testing, during times of pain.**

In the book *Miracles of Courage*, tells a touching story about **David, a 2-year old with leukemia**, who was taken by his mother, Deborah, to Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, to see Dr. John Truman who specializes in treating children with cancer and various blood diseases.

Dr. Truman’s prognosis was devastating. “He has a 50-50 chance [of surviving],” he said. The countless clinic visits, the blood tests, the intravenous drugs, the fear and pain--the mother’s ordeal can be almost as bad as the child’s because she is forced to stand by, unable to take the pain upon herself.

Young David never cried in the waiting room, and although his friends in the clinic had to hurt him and stick needles in him, he hustled in ahead of his mother with a smile, sure of the welcome he always got.

When he was three, David had to have a spinal tap--a painful procedure at any age. It was explained to him that, because he was sick, Dr. Truman had to do something to make him better. “If it hurts, remember it’s because he loves you,” Deborah said.

The procedure was horrendous. It took three nurses to hold David still, while he yelled and sobbed and struggled. When it was almost over, the tiny boy, soaked in sweat and tears, looked up at the doctor and gasped, “Thank you, Dr. Tooman, for my hurting.”

There are some hurts that you and I may experience for which we will never be able to find any good purpose. We will never be able to say “thanks for the hurting” in this life. But Scripture tells us, don’t give up. In the world to come, our understanding and perspective will be opened up and all of God’s graces will be revealed.

None of us understand why God created a world in which there is suffering. I’m not offering this message today as a full explanation. I’m simply making some suggestions as a possibility based on our scripture lesson and my own reflection. I do know there is no gain without pain.

Roman 8:28 says that “...we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

Maybe we will find out someday that in our struggles God was seeking to do something wonderful in our lives. When that day comes we just might one day whisper to our Heavenly Father, “Thank you for my hurting.”