

BE STEADFAST IN YOUR SUFFERING
ROMANS 5:1-5

Christian university professor Mark Talbot tells his story of suffering in [*When the Stars Disappear*](#):

When I was seventeen, I fell about 50 feet off a Tarzan-like rope swing, breaking my back and becoming partially paralyzed from the waist down. I spent six months in hospitals. Initially, I had no feeling or movement in my legs and no bowel or bladder control. I dropped from 200 to 145 pounds because I was so nauseated that I couldn't eat. Once my back had stabilized a little and I had regained some leg movement, the doctors tried to help me regain even more by having me crawl to breakfast each morning....

I am now in my sixties, and the consequences of my fall continue to multiply. I have to worry about things most people never even think about. In the last two decades, I sometimes have sleep-robbing leg spasms. And in the last few years my inability to do much walking has depleted the bone density in my hips to the point where, when I fell a couple of years ago, I broke my left hip and became wheelchair bound.

Other complications have hindered my traveling, and some have sometimes put my life at risk....I have had seasons of profoundly disorienting perplexity when, night after night, sleep fled from me because I was utterly unable to understand how God in his goodness could have been playing any part in what was happening to me. I have experienced hurts so deep and disruptive that they have dominated my consciousness, making me feel I could lose the Christian faith that has oriented me for almost my whole life. Like one suffering psalmist, I have felt like a little owl alone in the wilderness, feeling that my days were disappearing like smoke and my heart was withering away like parched grass (see Ps. 102:3-11).

While Talbot's suffering is unique to him, his experience of suffering is not unique. I have dozens of books on the topic and dozens to hundreds more articles on trials and suffering. And Scripture is exceedingly realistic about the various forms of suffering: illness, accident, weakness, aging and slow deaths, opposition, slander, personal attacks, persecution, broken relationships, and far more. Consider just a few examples from Scripture's warnings and preparations for suffering:

- ✓ "For man is born for trouble, As sparks fly upward." (Job 5:7; cf. 30:16-23)
- ✓ "The wicked have drawn the sword and bent their bow To cast down the afflicted and the needy, To slay those who are upright in conduct." (Ps. 37:14)
- ✓ "Your wrath has rested upon me, And You have afflicted me with all Your waves....My eye has wasted away because of affliction; I have called upon You every day, O LORD; I have spread out my hands to You....I was afflicted and about to die from my youth on; I suffer Your terrors; I am overcome." (Ps. 88:7, 9, 15; some form of the word "afflicted" appears >50x in Psalms alone.)
- ✓ "I was afflicted and about to die from my youth on; I suffer Your terrors; I am overcome." (Ps. 88:15)
- ✓ "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also." (Jn. 15:18-20)

- ✓ “These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation...” (Jn. 16:33a)
- ✓ “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22b)
- ✓ “[Let no one] be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this.” (1 Thess. 3:3)
- ✓ “Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me! Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” (2 Tim. 3:10-12; cf. Heb. 11:35b-40)
- ✓ “For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps...” (1 Pt. 2:21)
- ✓ “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you...” (1 Pt. 4:12)

Life on this side of Heaven is hard and Scripture does not hide that reality; Scripture never affirms the removal of suffering until we get to Glory. There are enough stories of suffering and persecution and enough affirmations of trouble in the Bible that it might be tempting for a believer to say, “Life is not as good as it seemed that Christ promised for us. It’s hard — unreasonably hard.” And in reading passages like Romans 5:1-2 and Paul’s recitation of the blessings of justification, the Roman readers might have been tempted to tell Paul, “That’s okay for you, but we are suffering here in Rome; you don’t know what our lives are like...” It seems that in verses 3-5, Paul anticipates just such a response and makes a most unusual statement about the blessings of justification by connecting our sufferings to God’s blessings. In these three verses Paul reminds us that:

BECAUSE YOU ARE JUSTIFIED, EXULT AND BE STEADFAST IN YOUR TROUBLES.

When we suffer, the temptation is to walk away from Christ, to give up on the faith, or to become apathetic, hardened, or even bitter about life and our position in Christ. But there is reason to be hopeful if you are suffering today (and all of us are suffering in some way). Why should we remain steadfast and why should we even rejoice? Here are four reasons to exult (rejoice) in our troubles and suffering — and these reasons are all provisions of God for us through the troubles and trials; they are **four products of the trials** when we respond in godly ways:

- 1. Be Steadfast in Trouble Because Trouble Produces PERSEVERANCE (v. 3)**
- 2. Be Steadfast in Trouble Because Perseverance Produces CHARACTER (v. 4a)**
- 3. Be Steadfast in Trouble Because Character Produces HOPE (v. 4b-5a)**
- 4. Be Steadfast in Trouble Because You Have the LOVE of God (v. 5b)**

It is tempting to think that suffering and troubles are always “bad” or “wrong.” They are not. And this passage demonstrates why suffering is not “bad.”

1. Be Steadfast in Trouble Because Trouble Produces PERSEVERANCE (v. 3)

- In verses 1-2, Paul began reciting some of the blessings that come to the believer through justification: We have peace with God (v. 1); we have grace for living (v. 2a); and we have the hope of glory (v. 2b).
- And in verse 2 he is emphatic and triumphant as he writes, **and we exult in the hope of the glory of God**. The word **exult** has the sense of “boasting” or “bragging.” As believers, we take pride in the confident expectation (**hope**) that we have for the eternal future. And that is a natural kind of response for the believer: we are confident of what the Lord is giving us and will give us and we point to Him as the Giver of this great gift.
- And then Paul connects the idea of exulting (bragging) to something completely unexpected: **but** (strong contrast) **we also exult in our tribulations** (v. 3).
 - ✓ This is an astounding statement. It’s astounding because it is contrary to everything we think about trials and suffering and persecution.
 - ✓ It’s one thing to say “be steadfast” (don’t move away from Christ), but statement is more than just “hang on.” It affirms that there is joy to be found in our trials (cf. also **1 Thess. 5:16, 18**; **Js. 1:2-4**).
 - ✓ Because of this verse, when we say, “be steadfast in trials,” we should be hearing the phrase, “cultivate joy in God in the midst of your trials.”
- How can Paul say this?
 - ✓ Paul can say this because **boasting in trials is the consistent theme of Scripture**.
 - The word **tribulations** (pl.) refers to pressures, hardships, sufferings, and trouble. They are distresses that come from sources outside of us. Sometimes **tribulations** refers to the unique distresses that believers face because they are followers of Christ. But it can also be broader than that: while some troubles are because of our relationship with Christ, every kind of trial also emanates from the fall of man (Gen. 3). Without the fall there would be no illness, no sin, no unjust suffering as the result of sin, and certainly no persecution. Paul is not specific about what he means in this passage, but I’m inclined to think he is thinking broadly about suffering.
 - Whatever the extent of the suffering Paul specifically has in mind in this verse, the rest of the NT affirms the reality of suffering, pressures, and troubles — for the believer and all people:
 - ... Tribulation and trouble can be expected (Jn. 16:21, 33; 1 Thess. 1:6; Acts 11:19; 14:22)
 - ... God has sovereignly ordained suffering (1 Thess. 3:3)
 - ... God provides comfort and encouragement in our troubles (1 Thess. 3:7)
 - ... All creation suffers, but no suffering compares to the coming Glory (2 Cor. 4:17; Rom. 8:18ff)
 - When we set our hearts on the world and its false promises, it will be difficult to exult in tribulations; but when we think biblically of troubles and the world, we *can* exult in them.

- ✓ Paul can also say this because **boasting in our trials is a way of boasting in God**.
 - Both in this immediate context and elsewhere, this word **exult** (boast) is used in relation to God — we boast in God (**Rom. 5:2, 11; 1 Cor. 1:29, 31**). So when Paul talks about boasting he is talking about finding our joy in God and His sufficient provision for us.
 - We might say this: When we boast in our trials we are boasting in our weakness, and to boast in our weakness is like saying, “I agree that I cannot endure this or do this, but God working in me and through me *is* sufficient,” which is Paul’s illustration from his own life (**2 Cor. 12:7-10**).
 - Without the tribulation and suffering, Paul would have only known what he could do and not what God could do. Only with the tribulation did he learn the extent of God’s gracious strength.
 - Friends, when we boast in our trials, we boast in the God who is sovereignly behind (designing) the trials and in the God who is strengthening us in the trials.
- ✓ Paul can say this because he is not saying we boast **about** our tribulations, but that **our boasting is in our tribulations**. That is, we don’t need to find pleasure or joy or exultation in the circumstances themselves, but while we are in the trouble, we can find reason to exult and find joy (both in God and in what God is doing in us as we are in the tribulation). Cf. also **1 Thess. 5:18**.
- ✓ [Are you looking for reasons to be grateful in your hardships? Even when we aren’t angry over our troubles, it’s easy to overlook the need to be grateful. What is God doing in you in your hardship?]
- ✓ Paul can also say this because **boasting in trials is a pathway to perseverance** (steadfastness).
 - Notice that Paul says we exult in our tribulations, **knowing that...** Because we know something about God and His Word, it transforms the way we think about troubles.
 - [Aside: this is one more verse that reminds us that the key to a sanctified life is to have a renewed mind. We don’t need our circumstances to change; but we do need to change the way we think in our minds about our circumstances, about God, and about sin & righteousness.]
 - What we are particularly to know and think about is that tribulation produces **perseverance**.
 - This same root word for perseverance is used in James 1:3-4 — it refers to spiritual fortitude; it has the sense of bearing up and holding up even while under a crushingly heavy load. It’s “stick-to-it-iveness” when there is a great trial. The little Energizer bunny that just “keeps on going” is cute, but he is facing no resistance. The one who perseveres is the one who “keeps on going” even when facing severe opposition.
 - *The persevering person is brave and **steadfast***. And think carefully about this, my friends. *How does someone cultivate perseverance? No marathoner ever cultivated it by sitting on the couch. No Olympic weight lifter ever developed perseverance by staying home from the gym. And spiritual endurance is not learned by reading a book or listening to a sermon. Persevering strength and endurance are only the result of tribulation. If we want to be spiritually strong, we are going to have to go through trial. John Stott has rightly said, “We could not learn endurance without suffering, because without suffering there would be nothing to endure.”*

- How can Paul say, “we exult in our tribulations?” Because tribulation is the only means to perseverance. Remove the tribulation and you remove the ability to grow strong.
- There is a second reason to exult in our tribulations —

2. Be Steadfast in Trouble Because Perseverance Produces CHARACTER (v. 4a)

- Not only do tribulations produce perseverance, but Paul says that perseverance produces *character*.
 - ✓ The word *proven character* refers to an approval that is given as the result of a trial. (In secular literature it was used in reference to proving the legitimacy of coins when placed under fire.)
 - ✓ When we persevere with Christ while suffering, it authenticates what we say we believe.
 - ✓ So the character of the Macedonians was proven when they suffered severely and still they were generous in their giving (2 Cor. 8:2) and Timothy proved his effectiveness and ability and zeal in ministry as he served alongside Paul (Phil. 2:22). This kind of proof happens through the cleansing fires of tribulation and trouble (1 Pt. 1:7).
 - ✓ And persevering and evidencing character will also lead to reward (Js. 1:12).
- How does perseverance produce character?
 - ✓ When someone endures one trial after another, or when someone endures a trial that is relentless and persistent, it is like a piece of metal being put under a flame and all the impurities drop away. And as the impurities are removed, then only what is genuine is left. And that’s what tribulations do for us — they remove the dross and extraneous and ungodliness from our lives.
 - ✓ George Whitfield wrote of his sufferings: “It is good for me that I have been supplanted, despised, censured, maligned, judged by and separated from my nearest friends. By this I have found the faithfulness of Him who is the friend of friends...and to be content that He to whom all hearts are now open...now sees...the uprightness of my intentions to all mankind.”
 - ✓ His suffering produced godly character.
- There is a third reason to exult in our tribulations —

3. Be Steadfast in Trouble Because Character Produces HOPE (v. 4b-5a)

- Remember that biblically, *hope* is a confidence in God’s work that is certain and sure (12:12; Gal. 5:5).
- When Paul speaks of *hope* that is the result of proven character, he means that as we go through trials and endure and prove the genuine character of our faith, that our hope will become more confident.
- We are not more confident because we are trusting ourselves; we are more confident because we see we really have been changed by God and we really have been saved — our justification is not an illusion.

- We experience the promise that God will complete what He begins in us (Phil. 1:6; 1 Cor. 1:8). And as we are progressively being matured here on earth we grow ever-more confident that we are among those who He will take into Glory and finish their salvation there.
- And notice that Paul also says in v. 5 that this hope **does not disappoint**. He means it is not shameful. No one who follows God will ever experience the shame of following a false god. Hope in God never ends up differently than promised. Hope in God's promises always yields the anticipated outcome.
 - ✓ Wishes and dreams often end up differently than desired.
 - ✓ But that is never true of God's promises and our hope in Him. He will not disappoint. Cf. 9:33; 10:11; **2 Tim. 1:12** (cf. also Ps. 22:5; 25:3; 119:116; Is 28:16).
- And with this sentence, Paul has finished where he began — in verse 2 he says, “we exult in hope of the glory of God,” and now we exult in our tribulations because they produce hope. And that makes the point that exulting in tribulations is not different than exulting in the glory of God. We exult in our tribulations because they lead us to think of how God will ultimately transform them and perfect us in glory (cf. **8:18, 29-30**; 1 Cor. 15:19).
- Does God actually produce hope in us through trials? Listen to the journal entry of **Henry Martyn**. He was a missionary to India and Arabia in the early 1800s. When he left England in 1806 he left behind his fiancée Lydia Greenfell whom he would never see again. He would die at age 31. Two months after arriving in Calcutta, one of the missionaries there preached against him and his theology, “calling his teaching inconsistent, extravagant, and absurd. He accused him of seeking only to ‘gratify self-sufficiency, pride and uncharitableness.’” [Piper, 5/4/86] Yet over the next six years, Martyn would translate the NT into Hindustani, Persian, and Arabic. How could he do that?

In the multitude of my troubled thoughts I still saw that there is a strong consolation in the hope set before us. **Let men do their worst, let me be torn to pieces**, and my dear Lydia torn from me; or let me labour for fifty years amidst scorn, and never seeing one soul converted; **still it shall not be worse for my soul in eternity**, nor worse for it in time. Though the heathen rage and the English people imagine a vain thing, the Lord Jesus, who controls all events, is my friend, my master, my God, my all.

- The tribulations of Martyn's experience produced endurance, proven character, and hope in God. This is what God does ultimately with all His people. Your trials are not for your destruction; they are for your maturation and perfection, and to give you confident joy in your final end (and that this life is not the end, but eternity in Glory is the end).
- How is it that hope is not disappointing and how do trials ultimately produce hope? Here is the final reason for our exultation in our tribulations and troubles —

4. Be Steadfast in Trouble Because You Have the LOVE of God (v. 5b)

- Hope is not shameful because *the love of God has been poured out...*
 - ✓ The word **poured out** means it has been supplied freely; it is a term that speaks to the lavishness of what God has done. He has been abundant in the pouring out of his love. His love is not dribbled out, drop-by-drop. It's poured out and poured out and poured out some more. Paul also doesn't say it is "given." That would be true, for it is a gift, but it is an astoundingly lavish gift, so Paul uses the word "poured." *In these troubles*, God has been profuse in the giving of His love.
 - ✓ And notice that this is the love of God — this is not our love for Him, but His love for us. He pours out His love, not just "on us," but also "within us" — **within our hearts**.
 - ✓ It is amazing that in this book that is saturated with the doctrine of God and the truth of the gospel, this is the first time the noun "love" is used. Paul is uniting three important themes — faith (5:1), hope (5:2, 4) and now love (5:5). And as he says elsewhere of this trinity of characteristics, the greatest of these is — love (1 Cor. 13:13). And this great love is also worked by God on us.
 - ✓ When we have trouble, we are tempted to say that God doesn't care (Mk. 4:38). But it is in our troubles that we see God's comforting love like no other circumstance (Mk. 4:40-41). In your trouble are you seeing God's provision of love and safety? Are you looking for it?
- Where does this love come from? It comes from the Holy Spirit — **through the Holy Spirit**.
 - ✓ That is, the Holy Spirit is the means through which we receive the love of God in us. And that points to the fact that when we are justified, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14). And when we are sealed with the Holy Spirit, we are indwelt by Him and through Him we experience the security and lavishness of God's love.
 - ✓ And Paul emphasizes the fact that the Holy Spirit is the means of receiving God's love when he says the Spirit **was given to us**. We did not achieve God's love or the Spirit on our own. The Spirit is not just a gift, but He is a gift of God's love.
 - ✓ Now think about what that means. In Romans 1-3 Paul emphasized that we were worthy of God's wrath (3:9ff). But instead of the wrath of God, *we have received the love of God*. Instead of receiving the outpouring of God's infinite wrath against us for our sin, through justification we receive the outpouring of God's love through the person of the indwelling Spirit of God.
 - ✓ And friend, Paul says that is particularly what God is working in our troubles. In our trials, the Spirit of God makes us to know the love of God. The love of God was poured out on you in your justification, and that love is present in you now in your trial, and you can know that love in particular ways in your trial that you may not know otherwise.
- I don't know anyone that says, "I love my trials and want more..." But I know a great many people who say, "I have experienced such grace and growth and love in my tribulations and I am deeply thankful..."

- Friend, if you have been justified — declared righteous by God through your faith in Christ — then you have this love and you have this hope that cannot be removed even by the greatest trials. Give thanks for what God has given you and how He has blessed you through justification.
- And friend, if you have not been justified — if you are not trusting in Christ and if you are not a Christian, then you don't have hope and you don't have love from God. But in fact, it's much worse than that — you have the opposite of everything we've talked about this morning: you are hopeless (you have nothing good in the future) and you are under the wrath of God (instead of the love of God). But that can change if you believe in Christ — **1:16-17** is the hope of all men who believe. You can become one who is loved by God if you simply believe.

CONCLUSION: **Guido de Brès** was the author of the Belgic Confession of faith and a faithful follower of Christ who was imprisoned for his faith and sentenced to death. In April, 1567, he wrote to his wife to encourage her in her faith while waiting for his execution. Some of what he said to her was:

And I pray you, my dear and faithful companion, to **join me in thanking God for what he has done**. For he does nothing that is not just and very equitable, and you should believe that it is for my good and for my peace. You have seen and felt my labours, cross, persecutions, and afflictions which I have endured, and have even had a part in them when you accompanied me in my travels during the time of my exile. Now my God has extended his hand to receive me into his blessed kingdom. I shall see it before you and when it shall please the Lord, you will follow me. This separation is not for all time. The Lord will receive you also to join us together again in our head, Jesus Christ.



This is not the place of our habitation — that is in heaven. This is only the place of our journey. That is why we long for our true country, which is heaven. We desire to be received in the home of our Heavenly Father, to see our Brother, Head, and Saviour Jesus Christ, to see the noble company of the patriarchs, prophets, apostles and many thousands of martyrs, into whose company I hope to be received when I have finished the course of my work which I received from my Lord Jesus Christ.

I pray you, my dearly beloved, to console yourself with meditation on these things. Consider the honour that God has done you, in giving you a husband who was not only a minister of the Son of God, but **so esteemed of God that he allowed him to have the crown of martyrs**. It is an honour the like of which God has never even given to the angels.

I am happy; my heart is light and it lacks nothing in my afflictions. **I am so filled with the abundance of the richness of my God** that I have enough for me and all those to whom I can speak. So I pray my God that he will continue his kindness to me, his prisoner. The One in whom I have trusted will do it, for I have found by experience that he will never leave those who have trusted in him....

Since such things have happened, my dear sister and faithful wife, I implore you to find comfort from the Lord in your afflictions and to place your troubles with him. He is the husband of believing widows and the father of poor orphans. He will never leave you of that I can assure you. Conduct yourself as a Christian woman, faithful in the fear of God, as you always have been, honouring by your good life and conversation the doctrine of the Son of God, which your husband has preached...

Farewell, Catherine, my dearly beloved. I pray my God that he will comfort you and give you contentment in his good will....

Here is a man who exemplified this passage — he had great trouble in this world, yet he boasted in God, grew in steadfastness, demonstrated his character, and clung to the certain hope of Heaven, and was not disappointed for he knew the experience of God's love.

de Brès' troubles were obviously not insignificant, nor are yours. But your trouble is not the end of the story — the end of the story is what God is working in you in your trouble, and the security of your future and the love of God in your heart. Be steadfast — hold onto your faith in Christ — in your suffering.

BENEDICTION: 1 Thess. 5:23-24