

Romans: Finding Joy in Difficult Times

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[0 : 00] Spirit, lead me where my trust is without borders. Let me walk upon the waters, wherever you would call me. Take me deeper than my feet could ever wander, and my faith will be made stronger in the presence of our Savior.

I don't know how you feel when you read those words. I don't know where you're at in your journey with God. I realize that sometimes when we speak on trials and tribulations, it's very difficult because we know that people come in and are in different places in their life.

They're dealing with things that are heavy and beyond their control, and some people have been in the pit for a long time, and they're just wanting to get out of the pit, and they're wondering if God knows them, is listening to them, is aware of what's happening in their life.

It was 1990, and I had just, we're going to get some wind up here, I just arrived in northern China, and I was there to teach the local Christians.

You know, I'd heard about the tough times the Christians were going through, and I'd been praying for them for a long, long time in the States. I prayed for the tribulations and the trials, and that they would make it through it, that they would stop.

[1 : 34] And it was not long until I got in the north part in my university that I heard a story. The story had happened a couple months before I got there, but it was still fresh in everybody's mind.

Three men, three students, had been caught smuggling Bibles into the university, into their part of the town, and they were arrested by the authorities, and they were put in prison for a month without food.

At the end of the month, the authorities wanting to make an example of them and to teach everybody else in the community and the university not to do that anymore, brought them out in front of the students and the faculty and the university at that part of the town and put them on display.

There was a table full of food. It was the best food that they could have at that time. To them, after 30 days of not eating, it must have looked like this amazing, amazing banquet.

There was a table with the Bibles piled up in front of it. And then there was a third table. There was a table filled with these containers full of waste and excrement and filth.

[2 : 45] And they brought the three young men out, and they asked them in front of everybody, they said, if you deny Christ, you're going to be set free. You'll be allowed to eat from this banquet. We won't bother you anymore.

But if you don't, it'll be more torture and struggles, and life is going to be very difficult. And right here and right now, we're going to force you to drink these three containers of crap.

I was told that without a hesitation, the three men went over, and they grabbed the containers of sewage, and they just started guzzling it. The crowd that was watching them went crazy.

It went berserk. I mean, there was total chaos. Teachers and students rushed the table, and they grabbed the Bibles, and before the authorities could do anything, they ran off with the Bibles.

And the authorities just sat there going, they couldn't believe what they'd just seen and what happened. A little later on, we were able to talk to some of those people who rushed the table.

[3 : 51] And we asked them, why did you do that? What was that all about? And they said there was something. There must have been something in that book that was very special, that was very precious, to make those young men do that, to stand up to the tribulation, to stand up to the trials.

There must have been something incredible in those books, and we want that. We want it. I remember after my first time to go home, I went to one of the leaders of the house church.

I said, I'm about to go back to America, and I want to pray for you. How do I pray for you? What do I tell the people in America? Do I tell them to stop praying for tribulation? Do I tell them to stop

praying for trials?

Do I tell them to stop praying for heartache? And he looked at me kind of in surprise, and he said, Tobin. He used my Chinese name, Mi Taoping. He said, in 1949, when all the missionaries left here, there were about 800,000 Christians in our country.

And now, 30 years later, because of what God is doing, there are 40 million of us. How can you pray for the persecution to stop? How can you pray for our trials to stop?

[5 : 12] Please just pray instead that we'd be faithful, that we'd be strong. I went home to Montgomery, Alabama, to my massive mega church, where people were living very, very comfortable lives.

And they asked me, well, how can we pray for the people in China? And in my mind, I was thinking, how can I pray for the people in Montgomery, Alabama?

Maybe I should be praying for tribulations. Maybe I should be praying for trials. Maybe I should be praying for difficulties.

We're in the book of Romans. Paul has been teaching the book of Romans now, and we've been in it for about eight weeks, but he's been teaching it through five chapters. Remember, in the first couple chapters, he's been arguing, and he's been defending.

He's been this lawyer. He's presenting his brief, his case. He wants everybody to know that he's right. He's truthful. It's logical. And you have to believe. But now, in chapter five, he just starts teaching with confidence.

[6 : 26] He's not trying to persuade anybody. He's trying to show people, this is true. This is what's happened to me. This is my experience. This is my experience.

Remember, up to this point in chapters one and two, the people have been kind of wandering away from God. I mean, they think they're with God. They thought that they were close to God.

They thought that they were 51% good, that things were going well, and as long as they were more good than they were bad, as long as they didn't do anything too bad, as long as they could fix themselves, they'd be okay.

But Paul says something very different there. He says, you know, guys, we are under God's wrath. We are not at peace with God.

51% is not going to hack it. In fact, we are so bad off in our slavery, in our selfishness, in our sin, that we're in bondage to our lives.

[7 : 28] We think that we're free, but we're slaves. But God, chapter 3 and 4, sends his son.

And he sends his son into this world and into our lives to make all things new through Jesus. Now he's given us his free gift of grace. Now we have a new relationship with God.

Now we can never be taken away from God. Now we can never lose God. Once we're made right with God, we're always right with God. Paul says that on the cross, Jesus hung there, and God took all of our badness, all the things we messed up with, all of our bad thoughts, all of our bad actions, all of the things we should have done, but we didn't do, all of these things that separate us from him.

He took all of those things and he placed them on Jesus. And his wrath was poured out and Jesus died. And on us, he took all of God's and Christ's good things.

He laid all of the perfections of Jesus, all the things that Christ did right because he did everything right, he lays them on us. And now it's a gift. And now you and I, as a gift, are made perfect.

[8 : 45] And we get to this place in chapter five where Paul wants to teach us what it means to be made perfect. He wants to teach us what it means to be made right in God's eyes.

And in these verses one through 11, he's gonna talk about five or six different things, but today I just wanna talk about one thing, one truth, one idea. I know it's the beginning, it's a journey.

We're gonna start off. Some of us, it's gonna be the first time we're gonna hear it, but we need to hear this if we're God's people he's gonna talk about this idea of suffering, pain, trials, and tribulations that we're gonna face as God's people.

I mean, when you read the passage, verses three through five, it's almost as if Paul is anticipating the question that's gonna be answered after you read verses one and two. I mean, after you read verses one and two and you read things like verse one, we have peace with God.

The idea is there that we're no longer at war with God. We're no longer combatants with God. We're no longer hostile to God. Now we are with him.

[9 : 55] And this peace is forever. When he talks to the words in chapter two, we have total and free access to God. Now, it was this idea that would have been revolutionary because before when you worship God, you had to go to the temple and you entered in through these certain numbers of doors.

And at this door, the Gentiles got stopped. And at this door, the Jewish women got stopped. And at this door, all the Jews got stopped. And only one person could go through the final door. And it was the high priest and he could only do it once a year to make atonement for God's people.

But in verse two, he says, now we have total access. We have free access. That all those walls are torn down. All those curtains are destroyed. That you and I every day can come to God and talk to him and worship him.

And you don't need a priest going before you. I mean, I love praying for people. And people come up and ask me to pray for them all the time. But my prayers are no more special than your prayers as God's children.

That's what Paul's saying. You have total access to him. In verse two, he says, you have a sure hope. And it's not hope like we talk about, like I hope this happens.

[11 : 10] But in Hebrew and Greek, it means it's a certainty. It's for sure. It's never going to change. We have this hope in the future. It's never going to change. It's because of what Christ did on the cross. And this hope is that we're going to be with God.

And in the end, no matter what we're going through right now, no matter what happens, it's going to be okay. And then someone asked this question.

Well, that's what it seems like when you read Paul's writing. And the question is this. Well, that sounds really good. It sounds really good that we have heaven. It sounds really good that we're justified. It sounds really good we can talk to God.

It sounds really good that ultimately everything's going to be okay and we're going to be okay and we're going to be there in the end. That sounds really good. But what about here and now? What about now? I mean, right now, life is difficult.

Right now, life is hard. Right now, I am in pain. Right now, there's tribulation. Right now, there's incredible pressure. How does all this talk about chapters 1, chapters 2, chapters 3, chapters 4, future, future, future?

[12 : 14] What does it mean to me right now? And Paul talks about that. And so today, what I want to talk about really briefly is I want to talk about tribulation.

I want to talk about trials. I want to talk about pain. I want to talk about suffering. It's going to be the beginning. So don't expect it all to come here, but my hope is that we start to think about this and dialogue this as a church family.

That if you're in your community group, you're going to be talking about it this week. In your lunch times after work with your other fellow brothers and sisters, you're going to be talking about this week. What does it mean for me to be a Christian and go through tribulation?

What does it mean for me to be a follower of God and be stuck in all the mess that is here right now? So I want to talk about how we should think of tribulation.

What is tribulation? And what we can learn about it? What can we learn from it? Now in Paul's day, there was two schools of thought about pain, suffering, and tribulation.

[13 : 19] These two schools of thought ruled everything. The first school of thought was the Epicureans. It was started by this Greek philosopher. The Greeks, didn't they have all the fun? They just sit around and think, and no one worked, and what a great life.

And so this guy's Epicurious, about 340 B.C., thought through this philosophy of life on how to deal with pain and suffering, and he said this. He said, we're always going to have pain.

We're always going to have suffering. There's no way we can get rid of it. So the key to life is to have more good things than bad things.

Fill your life with pleasures. Fill your life with great things. Fill your life with fun experiences. Do as many good things as you can do to counterweight the bad things that happen to you.

And in the end, hopefully your good experiences will outweigh your bad experiences, and you'll be said to have had a good life. I mean, it's kind of like the expat lifestyle in Hong Kong, isn't it?

[14 : 18] You work incredibly hard, and you play really hard. You work incredibly hard, and you play really hard. You work incredibly hard, and you buy a lot of stuff. I mean, we're Epicureans, right?

We're trying to outweigh the bad with the good. Now, there's another group of philosophers in Paul's day, and they were guys called the Stoics. They were started by this guy named Zeno. I don't know, again, the Greeks have the greatest names, so Zeno, what a fun name. And so Zeno, basically, he expounded this idea. This is how you handle pain. This is how you handle suffering. You know, the Stoics were kind of like, they're kind of like the British people of Paul's day. Now, I know I usually pick on Australians and South Africans, but I'm going to pick on the British today. The Stoics were kind of like the Brits. You know, the Brits are just, you know, bad stuff comes your way, keep a stiff upper lip. I mean, bad stuff comes your way, and you're like that guard, guarding everybody in Buckingham Palace.

[15:18] You don't move. You don't think. You're just there. You're stoic. I mean, when bad stuff comes away, you know, hey, who cares? Stay calm. Carry on. If you stay calm and carry on, everything's going to go away.

So bad things in life really, really don't matter because you're a rock. You're a Brit. Nothing can move you.

Now, I will say that is not totally true because this last Sunday at the Rugby Sevens, I saw a lot of British people totally moved. I think it was probably the first time since the university that I had somebody cuss at me.

I thought it was great. I mean, he didn't know what I did, and we're walking around, we're talking about rugby, and I'm holding my Diet Coke. And he's like, what the are you doing drinking a Diet Coke?

Why aren't you drinking a beer? Here, have some of this bloody lemon pie and eat it. I was like, wow, that's kind of refreshing. So I realized that to get a British person un-Stoic, you just give them a couple beers, and they'll be speaking.

[16:28] But in Paul's day, they didn't have that opportunity, and so they had these guys called Stoics, and they just stay calm, carry on, everything's going to be okay. But all of a sudden in this passage, Paul says something radical.

I mean, we don't realize it when we read this, but this is the first time in human history people would have heard words like this. Paul says that when plans, pain, and tribulation come into our lives, that God's in control.

That God has allowed these things to come in there. That there's nothing that's happening to you right now as God's children that surprises God.

That God is using these things to put pressure on you. The word tribulation, and I looked around, I couldn't find an example of it, but it's the word tribulum.

It's like a big, big rake, a big piece of wooden wood, and it has these wooden spikes sticking out of it. And the tribulum was this rake, and you just kind of threw it down on the grain, and when it hit the grain, it put pressure on it, and it broke the grain and the chaff, and it separated those things.

[17:53] The tribulum was this pressure, and you threw it down on the grapes, and you hit it in the grapes, and you hit it in the grapes, and it separated the bad from the good in the grapes.

And for the first time ever, Paul is saying that God knows what's going on. He knows the tribulum is coming into our life.

He knows that the pain and suffering are happening, and he has a plan for it. He has a plan for it.

The word tribulum, or tribulation, or trial, in Greek means, and I'm just going to use this as a definition. We're going to use it for the next couple weeks or whenever we talk about it.

It means anything that comes into your life that's going to bring you to a point of making the decision, are you going to trust God, or are you not going to trust God?

[18:55] A trial, a tribulum, is anything that comes into your life that's going to bring you to a decision, or point of decision, or are you going to trust God, or are you not going to trust God?

A tribulum can be anything. It can be an event that makes your life out of control. It can be your health issues. It can be relationship issues. It can be work issues. It can be financial issues. It can be anything that makes life harder, anything that threatens your faith in God's faithfulness, anything that threatens your faith in God's goodness, anything that threatens your faith in God's power, anything that threatens your faith that God is in control.

A tribulation, Paul says, is anything that comes into your life and threatens your thought that God is good and that he loves you as his children. And Paul says, by the way, those things are going to come.

If you live like you don't want them to, if you live like you're not expecting them to, if you live like when they come and they hit you and you go, oh, I wasn't expecting that. But Paul says, you've lost the story of what God wants to do in your life.

I've thought about this a lot. I thought about it a lot when I went back to Montgomery, Alabama, to talk to the people about what was going on in the church there. I know I'm going to offend most of us.

[20 : 21] Because I think in this point, God's word can be very offensive. But I think most of us think that trials are bad.

I think most of us think that tribulation is terrible. I think that most of us run from trials and tribulations and that most of us spend most of our time avoiding discomfort.

I think most of us, and I'm talking to myself, our main goal in life is to be happy and to feel good about ourselves.

I think that most of us, our main goal in our life is to be happy and to feel good about ourselves. We do that by we control things. We try to control our circumstances. We try to control our living conditions. We try to control our food intake. We try to control our safety. We try to control our health.

[21 : 34] We try to control our sleep. We try to control our relationships. We can try to control our work. But the minute we lose control of those things, the minute life comes unglued or unraveled or out of control, the minute those things happen, I get unhappy.

I get unhappy. And I spend a lot of effort and a lot of time trying to grab my control back. But Paul says, Tobin, if you live your life like this, if you live your life trying to avoid the tribulations and trying to avoid the pain, trying to avoid the suffering, trying to avoid the trials, if you live your life like this, you're always going to be disappointed.

You're always going to be unhappy because life as a child of God is always going to be full of those things. I asked somebody who I know in our congregation who's had a couple trials and tribulations to come up and share a little bit of their story.

And so I want to just introduce my wife. But don't laugh because her tribulation and trial isn't marrying me, though it might be. And so I've asked Christina to come up and just share a little bit about what God's been doing in her life.

So Christina, you're right there. So Christina, before we were talking last night and this morning, she goes, wow, I'm going to be a little nervous, so can you do something to relax me up and make me feel not so nervous?

[23 : 11] So I thought I'd just get up here and we can just talk about sex. So we want to talk about our sex life and sex. That probably relax everything. Okay, you did it. You did it. I'm fine.

I'm fine. I don't want to talk to you anymore. But I thought, so Christina is one of my heroes. And it's really neat to be a husband and be married to one of your heroes.

And so I thought that I wanted just you to share a little bit about one of the trials and tribulations that you have gone through in your life. Okay.

Well, maybe one of my trials is living with my husband. Or should I say, no, it's a pure joy.

Tobin wanted me to share one of the first trials, big trials in my life when I was younger. So when I was about 21 or 22 in university, I was in the U.S.

[24 : 17] And my parents were back. My father was working in Malaysia at the time. So we were halfway across the world from each other. And I had my wrist.

My wrist was hurting me. And so I said, okay, I have tendinitis in my wrist. And so I was like, okay, I'll just go to the medical clinic at my university and see if there's anything they can do about it.

So I went in and they took some blood tests. And it was a Friday. No, no, it was a, must have been a Thursday. So they come back, say, come back tomorrow, Friday. And we'll, you know, tell you what we find out.

So I go, I walk into the medical clinic at my school and all the nurses are saying, that one right there, that one right there. And I was like, okay, that's a bit weird, a bit strange, a little bit, you know, uneasy feeling.

And then they, they take me back into the room and the, and the doctor says, well, we don't know what's wrong with you, but you have low platelets in your body and forget about your hand.

[25 : 25] Let's deal with your blood. And so to this day, nobody's ever addressed my hand again. It's no longer priority. But they said, we don't know you might have cancer.

You might have leukemia. We don't know what you have. So we think you need to go to a real doctor, go and go to the hospital. So have a nice weekend. And we'll, you know, talk to you later. I was like, okay, oh my gosh. So I started, like a normal person would do, started freaking out. And I ran, ran home to my roommate and told her what the doctor said and started freaking out and started going, oh my gosh, you know, maybe I'm going to die tomorrow, you know.

And so, of course, it was always on a weekend. You always get news on the, on, you know, then you have to wait the whole weekend. Doesn't it seem like that? Always seems like that to me. So I had to wait and to go, go back on Monday to the doctor and, which started a series of tests. And basically, I have low platelets. In your blood, there are three things. There are red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets. And platelets is what makes your blood clot.

[26 : 38] So they weren't so concerned about my, breaking an arm. You see that. You see the brokenness or the, the blood or how much blood you're losing.

They're more concerned about internal bleeding and more specifically hemorrhaging to the brain, right? So I would, they said, so I went to the doctor and week after week, I went back for more tests and more checking my blood.

And my platelets, you're supposed to be 150,000 to 300,000 of platelets in your blood, in your body. I was, I had gone down to 50.

30,000. And then, 50,000. And then, it went down to 40,000. And then 30,000. And then 20,000. And the lowest my platelets got down to was 19,000.

And at 15,000, they say, we better, we need to put you in the hospital and you need to be bedridden because we're concerned about your, you know, walk. So I'd walk along the street in university in the sidewalk and see a crack and go, oh my gosh, I better be really careful with this crack because if I fell down, I could have internal bleeding and not know it and, you know, all of it.

[27 : 47] And then I did intramural sports, basketball, and I was like, okay, I guess I better not do that. That's just not safe. I found myself studying for finals in a hospital bed, just hooked up to IV just to get medicine to coat my platelets so I can keep going out and doing what I needed to do.

So how it all ended up, this went on for about a year. This whole process was probably about a year worth of my life. And what, in the end, I had a surgery at the end of this particular trial.

I had a surgery and they said that 80% of the time when you take out your spleen, your spleen is seeing your platelets as bad and it's destroying them.

So you take out your spleen and it solves the problem. Your platelets go back up to a normal level. So I had my spleen taken out and I have a lovely scar across my whole stomach to prove, to, you know, show my, that I had this surgery.

And, and my platelets went back up to a normal level of 100 for me, 100,000, which is great for me. So today, and today, how does that affect me? The only side effect it has for my life today is when I'm pregnant.

[29 : 06] And for some reason, when I'm pregnant, my platelets dropped back down again. And so, when my first pregnancy, we didn't know what, what we had in store, what, how, how it would affect my delivery and how much blood I would make, how much blood I would lose and, and could I handle a delivery or not.

But that's another trial, another whole story for another day. I won't go into that one. Okay. That's good. And we're glad you're here. Thank you. What did you, what was God teaching you during this time?

What were you learning? Well, soon I learned very quickly that I wouldn't, I was, there was no way I could live week to week depending upon my blood level count.

That if my blood level count was high, I was high. If my blood level count was low, I was low. So I was living this emotional roller coaster and I realized very quickly there's no way I can do this.

I, you know, I'm going to be a wreck. I'm going to be emotional, a physical wreck doing this. And so, the first thing I did was I started to pray. I started to say, Lord, help me take this away.

[30 : 20] What do I do? Help, help, help. You know, this is beyond me. Help me. And this, this is what started probably a lot of the questions I started to have because God didn't take it away.

It kept week after week. It still stayed and it would go lower and lower. And so, I started questioning, did I not have enough faith?

Was my faith not enough? Is that why my prayers weren't being answered? Is that why this wasn't going away? Or did I do something wrong and the Lord was trying to discipline me and this is why

this is happening to me?

I didn't understand why this was happening to me, right? I had plans for my life, you know? I was in university. I was going places. I had lots to do and lots of plans and the Lord stopped.

It all came to a complete stop and said, no, stop right here. And I spent more days in the hospital than I did, you know, at school. This really drew me to seek the Lord more and more and learn more about who he was and his character and I was like, I have to know why and what about God.

[31 : 30] Why is this happening in my life? And I looked, I started reading verse after verse. I did a whole, somebody challenged me to do a whole study on the word blood since that was my issue and so I did a whole study on blood which, you know, Jesus can relate to blood, right?

So, but one of them was like Mark, in Mark 9, there's a man who brings his son to Jesus because his son is ill and his comment to Jesus is help me believe within my unbelief and that gave me so much encouragement that it was God's job to give him the belief that he didn't have the belief, he didn't have the faith but he was asking the Lord to give him the faith that he needed to get through this and also in James 5, talks about prayer and the prayer and the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective and I didn't know, I didn't understand but I just was like I'm going to trust and I'm going to obey and I'm going to keep praying and the power of a righteous man is powerful and effective and I'm going to stand on that.

I said, I'm going to stand on your promises Lord, I'm going to stand to things I know is true about you that he gives, he gives our faith for that time of need that he is the giver of life that it's free for him to give and for him to take away.

I need to accept that and be content and learn to be content in that and that one other thing was that wherever my body is, my physical body is, that's where he wants me because he knows, he enabled me to be like this in this situation and so if my only place that my body can be is in a hospital, that's where he wants me.

If it's at home, that's where he wants me. If I'm able to go out, that's where he wants me and so to accept and yield my self to his will for my life and what he wants for me and my motto started to be in my life, I am not going to allow anyone or anything to rob me of the joy that the Lord has for me.

[33 : 49] How does this, if you think about that, where you've been and the transition of those things, how does that affect you today like where you're at right now? Okay. Because I know you never imagined being married to such a handsome husband or those type of things, so how does that affect you now?

Humility is not a problem, is it? Okay, thank you. Actually, just after Tobin asked me to talk about this, I've talked about a lot of other trials in my life, but not this one, and so it really made me look back at this because it was like when I was 21 or 22, and I realized, wow, that really has shaped that incident and those things I learned then really shaped the trials that I go through today and how I've handled them, and it's shaped who I am, who I've become today, and how I view hardships, and so that's pretty amazing.

I think it was always role modeled in my family, in my parents. It was always, it was modeled to me to have a thankful heart, to be thankful in all circumstances, regardless of your circumstances.

My grandfather was a medical doctor, and so he had a verse up that cheerfulness is the best medicine, and he would go around telling people jokes all the time, and when he got older, the same jokes all the time, and then my father had a severely handicapped brother, and those people in our lives are such a blessing to us, and they bring special appreciation in our lives, and so I saw that in my father and in my extended family and just appreciating life and what we had, but even, and even today, with my parents, my parents are going through health issues, and with their struggles, they still have such a thankful heart, and they go around, they go around saying, praise the Lord, you know, so that's wonderful, so, but even, even seeing, even seeing that role modeled in my family,

I realized that it didn't really, it took me experiencing my own struggles to truly learn, to choose, and to be thankful to the Lord, and that's what brings real joy in my life to the Lord is through those things.

[36 : 39] I think I learned from this to be more, to have empathy and more sympathy with people. I truly enjoy going to the waiting room now and sitting with the person waiting for somebody who's having surgery and praying for them, talking, making jokes, you know, I truly enjoy that because I've been there and I, and I see that when I was needy, when I had that need, someone was there for me and I, so I truly enjoy that.

And through my, some of my other struggles, like when I had an ectopic pregnancy and had miscarriage and when Tobin had his heart attack, I see that, that I was able to be more thankful and not so in despair about the situation.

I still deal with fears. I think those, some of it did create some different fears that maybe I wouldn't have today. Some of them irrationally.

I think that I went through a lot of questions about life and death and our mortality. And so, like, one irrational fear that got transferred to flying on an airplane.

And so, which is not very helpful since we live on an island, you know. but, but whenever I get on an airplane now, you know, I have to, I recite, I recite the verse to myself.

[38 : 09] Do not fear of sudden disaster for the Lord will be your confidence. Do not fear of sudden disaster. The Lord will be your confidence and there I go, you know. And I'm like, I'm going to trust the Lord.

I wish it was something else. There's other dangers in the world besides flying and I wish it was that one but it's not. So anyway. And every time, I always have, I also have to ask him to take my mind captive to his, to his thoughts and his word and ask, and every time I have a little panic moment, you know, what if something happened to Tobin or something like that then I would say, you know, Lord, I've seen that you, you are going to take care of me and I, and I ask him to take those thoughts captive and not go there with those thoughts.

But the most of the thing I think I do is I just, is I cling to his promises and I say, I'm, I'm counting on you, God, to come through with these promises for me in my life that he will never, ever leave me nor forsake me, that he has his perfect timing for me and I've seen it in my past and I know it for my future, I believe it for my future, that his angels are watching over me, all of us, which is an amazing concept to think about and that ultimately in 2 Corinthians, it says, you know, we, we may feel pressed, we may be pressed, but we're not going to be crushed.

We may be perplexed, but we will, we don't have to be in despair and I think the way, the reason that God can tell us that is because that's what Jesus, when he died for me, that's what he did, that I might be sad in life, but I don't have to despair because I have the hope in God and in the Lord.

Thanks, honey. So I'll get in trouble tonight when we go home about the sex comment so you can pray for me in the trials and tribulations that I will face later on.

[40 : 19] In verses 3 through 5, for the first time in human history, Paul says something that the Epicureans and the Stoics never heard. He says that as Christians we can actually rest.

He says as Christians we can actually have peace. He says as Christians we can actually have joy as we go through trials and tribulations. He says that the tribulations are proof that God is with us, that God is doing something in our lives, that God loves us too much to have us where we are. He says that trials and tribulations are God's ultimate development plan in our life. And the question is are we going to accept God developing us?

Verse 3, the sufferings help us to focus. They help change our focus. They help us to become single-minded. They help us to align to think of what God is thinking of.

Here's a question for you. Where's your focus? As you're sitting through the day what are you focusing on? What is the hope that brings you through that day?

[41 : 35] What is the hope that you focus on that takes you through the trials and tribulations? Paul says that God is using those things to take our mind off the things that bother us and distract us and to put them on to God.

It actually says that these tribulations are going to bring us patient endurance. Verse 4, he says, this perseverance leads to a tested character.

He says that as we go through these sufferings and these trials that our character is tested, it's refined, it's made strong, and that we don't have to doubt God's faithfulness.

Ultimately, he says, you always go to the cross if you lose your way and you work your way from the cross, which is the ultimate symbol of God's faithfulness to your life here and now.

The trials and tribulations bring about perseverance. The perseverance brings about proven character. And all of these things kind of cascade like a waterfall into verse 5 where he says, all of these things bring about hope.

[42 : 41] And it's not just a hope in the future, but it's a hope here and now. And it's not just a hope, I hope I get this promotion or I hope this works out well, but it's a certainty that wherever we are at as God's people, he's there.

And he's working through the trials and the tribulation in the difficult times in our life. The problem, I think, comes when we come into trials. And after a period of time, we start to doubt God's goodness.

We start to doubt God's faithfulness. We become angry. And Paul says throughout the first part of Romans that if that's our reaction, we're still living in Romans 1 and 2.

We're trying to work out our justification. We're trying to be good people. We're trying to make our life good. And when things don't happen that we want to have happen, we become angry because we think we deserve better.

But that's not grace. That's not grace. Paul says when we understand that we've been bought by God, when we understand that he paid the price of his son, when we understand Romans 3 and 4 and 5 and 6 and 7, that when those trials and tribulations and temptations and difficult times come into our life, we know that it's because God wants to do something in us.

[44 : 28] We know that it's because God is in control. We know that the only reason we're here right now anyway is not because we're so cool and we're so good and we so have our life together, but the only reason that we're here anyway is because God gave us this gift.

And sometimes I forget that. I forget that. Sometimes when things get hard, I forget that.

And the message of Romans 5, 1 through 11 is don't you ever forget that. Because that's a truth that is true of all God's children.

And God is with you wherever you're going and he's allowing those things to happen for a momentary time because he wants to do something incredibly special in your life.

And the only way he can do that is like a little kid. You take your little kid who's looking at the wall socket and they want to stick their finger in the wall socket.

[45 : 51] And as a loving parent, you come over there and you take them and you move their head and you face them some other place. You take them, you move them head, you face them some other place.

You eventually take them, you pick them up, trial, tribulation, difficulty, and you move them away from where they want to be. Because you know that if you don't move them out of that situation, they're never going to become whom they're supposed to be.

That's the message of Romans 5, verses 1-8. Does that make sense? To me, that is the most amazing truth as I think about us walking with the Lord, that God is so committed to us in his grace. Three final thoughts, three final thoughts, and we're done. Often our first reaction to pressure, tribulations, the tribulum, the trials, the pain, the suffering, our first reaction is usually to say, God, I need you, help me, help me get out of this, Lord, I need you.

But then after you've screamed that for about two days or three days, you start to become angry. And you start to become upset.

[47 : 18] And usually the first thing that we do, what Tobin does is he removes himself from God. He stops talking to God. He stops praying to God. He stops reading God's word. And the next thing that Tobin does is he removes himself from the people of God.

Does that make sense? Trials, tribulations, pray, help me, it's not working. God, I'm so disappointed with you. I'm so angry with you. I stop reading, I stop praying, and I stop hanging out with other Christians.

Don't do it. If you do it, you will never become whom God wants you to be. You need to be praying. You need to be reading God's word. You need to be accountable to other people. You need to be in fellowship. But often my first reaction after the suffering has gone on for more than a week is I start to doubt God's goodness.

Second thing, you are never called to deny your pain, your hurt, or your feelings. Scripture never says, don't feel pain.

[48 : 33] Don't be a Brit. Scripture never says, be stoic. Scripture says, speak what you're feeling. Share it with the community. Share it with God. But do me a favor.

Please don't go around going, I got cancer! Praise the Lord! Isn't that amazing? I got cancer! Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Because people who aren't in the family of God, they think you're weird. I mean, that's stupid. And you want me to tell you something? That is stupid. Because cancer is evil. Broken relationships is evil.

Pain and suffering is evil. It's all because of the fall. It's all because we made poor choices. So instead, when you're going through that time, say something like this.

God, in the craziness, I don't know what's going on, but I'm so thankful you're here. God, my life is out of control.

[49 : 46] I don't know where this is going to go. I don't know what's going to happen next. I've been praying for so long. But I'm so thankful you're here. And I trust you.

Don't deny your feelings. Don't deny your pain. Don't deny your suffering. But realize that God is in the midst of that. And he's breaking that rake across you because there's a lot of things on you that he wants to separate and to tear apart because there's something amazing underneath there. And you can't be that type of person. You can't be that person that God wants you to be. until he runs that rake over you. Finally, this whole thing is a process.

It's a journey. I mean, sometimes it is a hard journey. It doesn't happen instantly. It doesn't happen instantly.

But it happens. hang in there. God never gives up on you.

[51 : 08] The moment you think that, you look at the cross and you realize that he gave the most important thing in his life for you. If he gave the most important thing in his life for you, surely he's going to take care of you while you're apart from him.

Surely he's going to be with you in the midst of the trials. Surely he's going to be with you in the midst of the tribulation. Surely he's going to be with you in the midst of the difficulties. It's a process. Don't expect it to happen like that. But know that when it happens, God is going to do something amazing in your life.

I love to scuba dive. I've been certified to about four levels down. I do deep dives. I do nitrox. I do all those things. When I first started to scuba dive under the water, it scared the crap out of me. Because I would look down 30 feet up and you would see the bubbles going up there and you would see the water up there. And the scuba diver told me, the very first guy, it was an Aussie guy, he was drunk one time and we were talking and he was training me and he goes, this is your regulator.

[52 : 26] Your regulator is one of the only foolproof pieces of equipment in the world. There are not many pieces of equipment that are foolproof. But your regulator is.

You breathe in, it gives you air, you breathe out, stuff goes out. You breathe in, you give you air, you breathe out, stuff goes out. Don't ever take your regulator out. There's going to be times you're going to feel like taking your regulator out.

You're going to be under and you're going to cough and you're going to want to take your regulator out. Don't take your regulator out because you're going to drown. Keep your regulator in. He goes, I was drunk one time and I went down for this, how do I do that?

I'm talking like a Texan. I went down for this deep dive and I threw up. And he goes, when you throw up, your first reaction is take everything out of your mouth and pfft, pfft, pfft.

But you're 100 feet underwater and you do that and you drown. And he said to me, you know, even when you throw up, your regulator works. Two years later, I'm doing my rescue dive certification.

[53 : 34] I've had four dives in the day. I'm exhausted. I mean, I went out for lunch. I ate something and I was really, really sick. And so I'm 45 feet underwater and I have to throw up.

And I have no idea what I'm going to do. And all of a sudden in my mind, I'm thinking, the regulator's foolproof. The regulator's foolproof. Don't ever take it out. Keep it in. Don't ever take it out. Take it in. And so I'm underwater.

I can't get up. I'll get the bends. I'm about to throw up. And the only thing I do is I stop everything. I take my hand and I push my hand on my regulator so that I don't pull it out and I throw up. 40 feet underwater.

I mean, it's amazing. You know what? The regulator worked. Blah! Pfft! Fish come in. But I keep breathing.

Blah! Poo! Fish come in. Blah! You know what? That regulator works. You know when you go scuba diving with me now?

[54 : 43] You know what I say? This is the only foolproof piece of equipment in the world. No matter where you are, no matter what happens to you, no matter what kind of situation you are, don't ever take your regulator out because you will be able to breathe oxygen on demand, exhale on demand.

They don't get mixed up. Even the vomit goes out. You don't breathe in their vomit. It goes out. You're okay. This is the only thing you need. How do I know that? I know that. Because I went

through a trial and now I trust that regulator.

Paul saved Jesus. He's the only thing you need. If you're down and it's out of control and things are out of things and you don't know what you're going to do, you think you're going to drown, you hold on to him because he'll take you through.

Don't pull him out. Don't separate your life from him because he'll take care of you. He'll take care of you if you let him.

If you let him. God's throwing a rake across some of us right now. We're getting crushed. We're getting pressed. We're feeling uncomfortable.

[56 : 10] He's doing something new in our life but he has that promise that his son is always there. He won't let you down. He won't let you down. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.