



TIME OF GRACE®

Choose Gratitude Over Grumbling: Even When You're Hurting

Study Notes

Summary

Do you think it's possible that the way God designed your character to grow is the same way he designed your muscles to grow? Do you think it's possible that you could only get spiritually to certain places if you had first passed through the difficulties of pain, suffering, and hardship? And if so, do you think instead of lamenting and complaining and grumbling, you could actually get to a place where you appreciate the suffering you go through because you've learned and taught yourself that it leads to really great spiritual places?

- **Romans 5:1-4:** ¹Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through 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. ³Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope.
- Pain produces _____

- "It seemed intended by the blessed providence of God that I should be blind all my life, and I thank him for the dispensation. If perfect earthly sight were offered me tomorrow I would not accept it. I might not have sung hymns to the praise of God if I had been distracted by the beautiful and interesting things about me."
- Grown requires _____ and _____.
- **Romans 5:5:** 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.
- Your pain plan: Dial _____ (Romans 5, James 1, 1 Peter 1).

Points to Ponder

1. Reread Romans 5:1-5, and then compare it with James 1:2-4 and 1 Peter 1:6,7. What similarities do you see among these three passages? What differences?
2. Evaluate: Better a scar-covered Christian of character than a beautiful believer who has never had to persevere.
3. Search the internet for the life story of Fanny Crosby. What can we learn from her about God's purposes for our pain?

Homework for next week

Read James 1:16,17.

Time of Grace Ministry
Gratitude Over Grumbling: Even When You're Hurting
Romans 5, James 1, 1 Peter 1
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Do you think it is possible that your soul could work the same way as your body? Do you think it is possible that the way God designed your character to grow is the same way he designed your muscles to grow? Do you think it is possible that you could only get spiritually to certain places if you had first passed through the difficulties of pain, suffering, and hardship? And if so, do you think it is possible that, just like my wife who comes back from the gym, instead of lamenting, and complaining, and grumbling, you could actually get to a place where you appreciate the suffering you go through because you have learned and taught yourself that it leads to really great spiritual places? Those are the questions I want to explore with you today.

As we open this Book, the Bible, we are going to try to see how God works. Not just through the good days that we have, but through the bad ones. Not just through the celebration and the pleasure, but also through the suffering and the pain. Now, before I dive in, I should admit this. To learn to be grateful for the hard times of your life will be immensely more difficult than the struggle of a gym, and here is why. When you go to the gym, you are mostly in control of the amount of pain that you feel. Right? If my wife does not like the burn, she can slow down, she can stop, she can skip a workout, she can cancel the membership. She is in control of the duration and the degree of that pain, but you have probably come to realize that life is not like that.

If you have been through something or you are going through something difficult right now, you realize that you do not have the power, and you do not have the control, and you do not just look up to heaven and say, "Okay, God," and it stops. If you have struggled with middle school or high school, the pressure of homework, and AP classes, and GPA, and getting into college, and keeping up, and the competition, and the parts and the sports - you would love to just say, "Okay, I am done with the pressure. I have felt overwhelmed long enough," but, life does not work that way. If you have had financial struggles, you cannot say, "Okay, I am done being homeless. I am done crashing at a friend's house. I am done with this credit card debt." Life does not work that way. If you have struggled with dating and romance, and you are sick of being lonely or you are sick of, you know, the struggles, and the arguments, and the fights, and you just want to say, "Okay, God, now push the button so I can have happily ever after," life does not work that way. And I could give you a thousand more examples - if you are battling depression or anxiety, if you have been through a divorce or lost someone that you love. All of us would love to say to pain, "Okay, that is about enough," but that is not how life works.

But that is why today, we are going to find some help in this Book. Now, today we are going to open our Bibles to Romans 5, and the Apostle Paul, a guy who was incredibly grateful and went

through an incredible amount of suffering, is going to help us to thank God, even in the midst of pain. So, if you want to follow along in your Bible, let us open up to Romans 5, where Paul kicks off with these words. "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through whom," that is Christ, "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." That means if you are a follower of Jesus, and if you are not, you can trust in him today - you stand in the place called grace. That you wake up and you are loved, and you mess up and you are still loved. And tomorrow when you wake up, whether it was a good day or a terrible day, you are still loved, because Paul says we stand in grace. We thank God for every eternal blessing and every spiritual blessing, and then, Paul gets to the pain.

Check out these epic words from Verses 3 and 4. He continues, "Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope." If you do not know what God produces through the harder days of your life, all you will do is vent, and grumble, and beg him that they would stop. You are kind of like the woman who goes to the gym, but she does not know how her body gets better. And so, when she is suffering, and when she is sweating, and when the instructor is pushing her and pushing her, she does not know that pain leads to growth, and so, all she does is complain. But if you know how the body works, the Apostle Paul says even then, you can boast in your suffering.

So, let us look at what Paul says happens when God allows pain in our lives. Paul says, first of all, that pain produces perseverance. Pain produces perseverance. My simple definition of perseverance is the ability to not quit. You have a bad day but you don't quit. And when you think about it, perseverance is such an important thing in your life because if you don't learn to persevere, you will lose out on some of the best gifts that God has to give. I mean think of church, or think of dating, or think of family, or think of friendships. Imagine a person who quits the first time it gets hard. What will they end up with in life? Can you imagine, parents, if you had kids and you would keep them and love them, but the first time they did not make you happy? There would be a lot of kids locked outside of a lot of homes, right? Even at church, right? If you loved coming to our church, but the first time I said something that offended you, the first time one of the saints here at the CORE sinned against you, if you bolted? You would never find a church home.

So, pain is when you go through something difficult in life, but you do not quit, you do not give up. And once that produces perseverance in you, here is the next thing Paul says, that that perseverance produces character. You end up becoming the kind of person who has passed the test and who knows if they can get through it. Well, like a few church services where I am not getting a ton out of it? I can get through that without quitting. A week, or a month, or a season of a relationship where it is not all like, butterflies, and magic, and sprinkles? I can get through that. Disagreements with people who are pushing me and not being nice to me, but I do not lash out or snap back, I can get through that. You will never know if you passed that test until you actually take it. And so, pain produces perseverance, and perseverance produces character. And Paul eventually says that character leads to hope. Christians who develop this kind of character, they know that they have a great future with God. And so, they are strong, they can endure, they hold onto their faith, they do not burn bridges. They end up saying things like, "I can do all things

through Christ who strengthens me." That is Paul's process. If you know that, if you remember what pain produces - perseverance, character, and hope - you will not give up and you will not give in. You will not grumble. You might teach your own heart to be grateful, even on the harder days.

It kind of makes me think of Fanny Crosby. Ever heard about Fanny Crosby before? It is a scary picture. Those are her dark, tinted glasses because Fanny Crosby, who lived about 100 years ago, died at the age of 94, was blind her entire life. She got sick when she was about six weeks. She lost her sight and for the next 94 years, she never regained it. But Fanny Crosby had an incredible faith. Did you know that Fanny Crosby wrote more Christian songs than Martin Luther, Chris Tomlin, and Hillsong combined? By the time she died at age 94, she had written over 8,000 hymns and songs of Christian praise - 8,000! She was so good at what she did that the people who collected and published hymnals in those days were embarrassed that their hymnals were almost entirely Fanny Crosby songs. And so, she literally wrote under multiple names so that hymnal gatherers could say, "Well, it is not just Fanny's work."

Fanny, you would think, would be mad at God. To live 94 years... how many times do you think she prayed, and yet never once did she see. But she did not grumble. No, this woman was crazy grateful. Let me show you something that Fanny Crosby once said. She wrote, "It seemed intended, by the blessed providence of God, that I should be blind all my life, and I thank him for the dispensation. If perfect earthly sight were offered me tomorrow, I would not accept it. I might not have sung hymns to the praise of God if I had been distracted by the beautiful and interesting things about me." Now, that is faith, huh? Do you know how old Fanny Crosby was when she wrote those words? Eight. A third grader said that. "If God would give me back my sight, I would say, "No, thank you," because I do not want to be distracted from the one thing that matters more than anything else - singing praise out of a grateful heart to God." And it might seem crazy, but, brothers and sisters, you can end up in the same place. Fanny Crosby had the same Father, the same Savior, the same Spirit, the same Book, the same opportunity to talk to God in prayer, and you can end up with her faith if you do not forget.

If you know, like the Apostle Paul did, what God does through moments of pain. If you know that God is still at work and he still has a plan, even if your season has been very, very bad. If you know, even on the days that you hurt, that God has not turned on you or broken his promises to you. If you know that, you can have the kind of faith that is grateful to God even when life is hard. You can be the kind of Christian that says, "I know that God is still for me," the Christian who says, "I know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him," the Christian who says, "I know that I can do all things through the God who strengthens me. I know that God has plans for me, and I know those plans are not to harm me. I know that God has hope for me, and I know that God has a future for me. I know. I am not going to forget it. My body hurts. My family is messed up. This is broken. I am sitting in a jail cell, but here is what I know - that God is with me, and God is for me, and God has a plan for me."

And if you know that, you stop just saying, "God, thank You for the food and thank You for the forgiveness," and you start saying the craziest thing in the world - "Thank You, God, for the pain." Because when you get to that spot, you realize that your soul is a lot like your body. If you

are watching at home, can you put down your remote, your device? Because I need you to do something with me. I need you to flex. All right? I will wait for you. Let us see the muscles. Oh, Gunner! Holy cats, put those things away! Yep, all right, show it to the neighbor next to you. All right. Grab onto your biggest bicep. Guys, you are enjoying this a little bit too much out there!

At my house, we Novotny's are not the strongest people you will ever meet, so the girls and I love to strut around the house and flex a lot, so we have invented something that we call the B.B.C - the Big Bumps Club. Yep! So, all the girls and I, we are always flexing in front of each other. Squeeze your muscle for a second. Do you know how a muscle like this, your bicep, gets bigger? Two things. If you are going to grow physically, what you need is stress and rest. Just physically, biologically, what makes a muscle grow is when you stress it more than it's used to being stressed. I mean, you can't just pick up your phone a few extra times, you have to actually push it so hard and the muscle fiber gets so stressed that microscopically, it tears. So, when you go back to the gym and your muscles aren't used to it, you can barely get off the couch. Or, you help someone move to a new apartment. You use muscles you haven't use in a long time, you have to stress in ways that your body is not used to. And the fibers tear, and then, that doesn't make you stronger by itself.

You need rest. You have to take a day or two off the gym. You have to work out another group of muscles. You have to sleep. You have to eat enough protein, get enough nutrition and then your body, it repairs those microscopic tears makes them bigger, and bigger, and bigger, and you end up stronger, and stronger, and stronger.

And that is kind of how faith works, too. If God just gave you the same old stress that you had last year, you would not grow. He has to allow a new challenge, a new stage of life, something you are not used to, something your soul is not accustomed to. And I know you wish that was not the case, but it is true. If you could handle it, you would not need God to handle it. If you could just whip this off and tackle this challenge without opening that Book or folding these hands, you would not grow spiritually. But if something challenges you so much that you say, "God, I cannot," it will break you down. Your self-assurance and your confidence, your self-righteousness, God will not microscopically, but macroscopically, tear you apart a bit; and then he can feed you, and he can heal you, and he can strengthen you.

Look at these last words we are going to study from Romans 5. Paul says, "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." God's love has been poured out into your heart." Like, if you thought that you were suffering with an addiction because God turned on you and did not love you, if you thought that you were sitting in a jail cell, or dealing with a breakup, or still grieving his loss because God was against you or he hated you, Paul says, "No, no, no, no, no. God's love has been poured out into our hearts." The Holy Spirit himself, given from God, is pointing us towards Jesus and saying, "No, God loves you. He still loves you. You are hurting, but he loves you." And do not forget what we studied last week. Through Jesus Christ, you are chosen, you are holy, you are blameless, you are predestined, you are adopted, you are graced, you are redeemed, you are forgiven, you are included, you are saved, you are marked, you are filled, you are an heir of eternal life. You are God's own possession."

God is so good to you and his love is so intense for you, do not let this pain convince you of anything else. Hope has been poured out into our hearts. And so, even while we suffer, we know we have this rest, but I am good with God. Life might stress you; it might push you, it might tear at your soul, but let the love of God, poured into your heart, heal you and make you stronger than you were before.

So, to help that happen, I want to leave you with just a little bit of homework. I want you, the next time you are suffering, the next time you are finding it very hard to be grateful, to dial 5-1-1. All right, that is my fancy way of saying I want you to read three parts of the Bible - Romans 5, James 1, and 1 Peter 1. So, maybe you are suffering, maybe you are kind of new to the Bible. It is a big Book - 66 books, how many chapters, 31,000 different verses. Where do you go when you are in pain? Here is what I say - dial 5-1-1.

Romans 5, we just studied. In James 1, Jesus' brother says, "Consider it pure joy when you face trials, because we know that the testing of our faith develops perseverance." In 1 Peter 1, Jesus' close friend, Peter, says, "Hard times come to prove the genuineness of our faith, and it results in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." Peter and Paul and James want to remind you so you know what God does through pain. So, next time you're hurting, don't just sit and stew, dial 5-1-1 and let the Holy Spirit pour truth, and hope, and love into your heart, so that maybe you can do something you've never done before and say "Thank you, God, even now, even for this."

That's what Fanny Crosby did. I'm going to invite our musicians forward and they're going to help us sing our amen to this message. When Fanny Crosby was 55 years old, she had lived with almost 55 years of blindness. But instead of grumbling why God had not fixed her problem, she picked up her pen and wrote one of her most famous songs, a song called, "To God Be the Glory." When I was a kid growing up in church, this was one of the songs we sang all the time, that we are going to, "Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the earth hear his voice. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the people rejoice." We are going to celebrate the goodness of God.

I sang that song how many times as a kid, but what I never knew was that it was written by a woman who lived with incredible pain. And in the song, Fanny Crosby said, even now, I have a reason to sing. Even now, I have a reason to praise. And she said, on that day when I see you, Jesus, when he opens my eyes for the first time, I will praise him again. But it will not be the first time, because I already started to praise God in the midst of my pain.

So, I want to invite you to please stand. And today, as we think about all of the drama in our families, with our mental health, with our finances, our fertility, our grief, our loss, as we battle addictions, as we sit in jail cells, wherever we are, today we are going to join Fanny Crosby and sing as people of faith. So, as you catch on to the lyrics of her famous song, let us sing praises to God.

Let us pray.

Dear God, you have done great things for us. The fact that we stand right now in grace, that everyone who trusts in Jesus is so insanely and unconditionally loved that we will never get to the end of the bottom of it, we thank you for that, God. We thank you that all of the struggles of this life, all of the pain that we go through cannot touch the promise that you have made, that everyone who believes in your Son has life that will never end.

And we thank you, God, that pain does not get the last word with you. You use it to refine us, and to change us, and to make us stronger, that our suffering is not in vain. That our work, God, of trusting in you and seeking you in those moments, it connects us with people that we would not have met before. It gives us experience and expertise that we would not have had before. It allows us to prove that you are a God who is good, not just because you give good things, but because you, yourself, are the source of goodness.

And so, God, boldly we push back against the enemy and his lies, and we praise you today. If it is a good day, a bad day, it does not matter the day, God. We praise you because you are you, and you are with us, and you are always working for the good of those who love you.

I pray, Heavenly Father, that you will protect everyone who is here today. Jesus, you said that we would have many troubles in this world, and we just do not know what is going to happen this week, or this year, or this decade. We do not know if it is going to get easier or harder, so protect us from the temptation. Help us to know and to remember what kind of God you are and what kind of good things you do. Protect your people, bless your church, and help us to say thank you, God, for everything. We pray this all, Jesus, in your beautiful, powerful, and sufficient name. Amen.