

Bible Reading Plan

WEEK OF MAY 17, 2020

WEEKLY READING: ROMANS 2-6

PASSAGES REFERENCED: ROMANS 5:1-5 & JAMES 1:2-4

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. – Romans 5:1-5, NIV

As my friend Bonnie Swanson always says, God is doing some major layering right now. Meaning, we've been talking about hope and our current struggles a lot lately, and then these themes show up again in our Bible Reading Plan this week. So let's lean into this layering by digging further into this truth in our lives right now.

This passage gives us a bit of a different perspective, though. It shows us a growth progression: suffering produces perseverance which produces character which produces hope. Now, you may look at the word "suffering" and think that this doesn't really apply to your life right now. Well, that's probably true. Many of us aren't actually suffering due to COVID-19. Some are: like those who have the virus and others who lost their jobs due to economic shutdowns. But many of us are just inconvenienced and living life differently than before. So we won't call that suffering – just struggling. But I think that still counts. So if it helps, think of the verse as saying, *"struggling produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope."*

That means right now we are building perseverance, character, and hope. Think about your life these last couple of months. Can you see how that's been happening for you? Do you feel like you have more perseverance, character, and hope than you did before COVID-19 disrupted your life?

The challenging thing about this passage is that it basically calls us to celebrate our sufferings and struggles because of what they produce. That's tough. Many of us may not feel like doing that right now. I'm reminded of a similar passage in James: *"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."* (James 1:2-4, NIV)

We're to consider it pure joy when we're suffering and struggling and facing trials of many kinds? Yes, because it produces perseverance which produces character which produces hope. When we struggle and go through trials, God can use that to mature us – to push us and grow our faith. So we shouldn't bemoan the fact that we're facing challenges. We should embrace them as best we can. Because couldn't we all benefit from more perseverance in our lives? And don't we all want to be more hope-filled individuals? Of course. So don't run away or hide from your suffering or struggles right now. Embrace them while thanking God for the ways He will use them to grow you and strengthen your faith. – Sarah Neel