

A. THE UNEXPECTED AND UNWELCOME

- Jesus did not want us to be surprised when unwelcome circumstances inevitably come our way: Jn 16:33 AMP—I have told you these things so that in Me you may have [perfect] peace. In the world you have tribulation *and* distress *and* suffering, but be courageous [confident, undaunted, filled with joy]; I have overcome the world.” [My conquest is accomplished, My victory abiding.]
- Likewise the Apostle Paul wanted to prepare believers for the suffering and troubles that they would experience: Rom 5:3-5 AMP-- Let us also be full of joy now!] let us exult *and* triumph in our troubles *and* rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that pressure *and* affliction *and* hardship produce patient *and* unswerving endurance. And endurance (fortitude) develops maturity of character (approved faith and tried integrity). And character [of this sort] produces [the habit of] joyful and confident hope of eternal salvation. Such hope never disappoints *or* deludes *or* shames us, for God’s love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us.
- The truth, even truth that is difficult, is crucial if we are to stand up during hard times: Eph 6:14—Stand, therefore, having girded your loins with truth.
- Paul wants us to expect more than mere inconveniences. The word used in the original language is “*thlipsis*,” indicating that the trials involved great pressure. (G2347)
- This term, also translated “tribulation,” indicates pressure that is weighty, squeezing, or crushing. The readers, suffering Christians in Rome, could readily relate to this.
- We see in Romans 5 that it’s an option for us to feel these pressures without being discontent or hopeless!
- There’s an opportunity to experience hardships differently when we are not caught by surprise and when we hold the hope of overcoming them:
 - 1 Thes 5:4, 8 JBP-- But because you, my brothers, are not living in darkness the day cannot take you completely by surprise...we men of the daylight should be alert, with faith and love as our breastplate and the hope of our salvation as our helmet.
 - 2 Cor 4:8 ERV-- We have troubles all around us, but we are not defeated. We often don’t know what to do, but we don’t give up.
- Paul learned to lean on God because of his suffering: 2 Cor 1:8-9 NLT—We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it. In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead.
- LISTENING EXERCISE:
Think about the hardships/ tribulations in your life – those situations that are painful and that have continued longer than you would like. Name your top 2 or 3 here:

To what degree have you been surprised by their presence and their intensity?

What kind of impact have they had on your sense of hope and contentment?

- Insights:

B. THE UNEXPECTED BENEFITS

- While no one wants to experience hardships, we need to know that we can face them like Jesus, with the expectation of joy and a beneficial outcome:
 - Heb 12:1 NLT-- Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne.
 - Is 53:11 MSG-- Out of that terrible travail of soul, he'll see that it's worth it and be glad he did it. Through what he experienced, my righteous one, my servant, will make many "righteous ones," as he himself carries the burden of their sins. Therefore I'll reward him extravagantly—the best of everything, the highest honors— Because he looked death in the face and didn't flinch, because he embraced the company of the lowest. He took on his own shoulders the sin of the many
- Instead of coming away from life's trials disappointed and discontent, the Holy Spirit provides us with the wisdom and power to endure and be better on the other side.
- God intends for suffering to be productive, growing us into Christlikeness. This is a common theme in the Old and New Testaments. (Job 23:10, Ps 66:10, 1 Pt 1:7, Jm 1:2-4, Heb 12:11)
- Paul wants us to know--and he wants others to know--that within every believer resides the potential for glory to come forth: Col 1:27—Christ in you, the hope of glory
- Pressure causes what's on the inside of us – both holy and unhealthy parts are exposed. Christ will use the pressure to cause us to shine even brighter!
- The Holy Spirit, placed within us at our new birth, has all the power we need to overcome. Yet renewed minds are required to recognize this and react differently.
- Our old nature was programmed to grumble, become impatient, and to doubt God's goodness. In Christ, a new chain of events is possible and it's profitable.
- "Perseverance, character; and character, hope: This is a golden chain of Christian growth and maturity. One virtue builds upon another as we grow in the pattern of Jesus." (Guzik)
- Perseverance
 - A Spirit-given ability to endure hardship without trying to avoid it; the determination to honor God and to extract all the benefits that can be had from suffering (Strong's 5281)
 - Luke 21:19 AMP-- By your steadfastness *and* patient endurance you shall win the true life of your souls.
 - Heb 10:36 AMP-- For you have need of patient endurance [to bear up under difficult circumstances without compromising], so that when you have carried out the will of God, you may receive *and* enjoy to the full what is promised.
- Character
 - The Greek word often described metal put into a flame to prove it genuine or authentic. When applied to believers, it speaks of a faith that has withstood testing. (Strong's 1382)
 - 1 Cor 4:15 MSG-- I'm writing as a father to you, my children. I love you and want you to grow up well, not spoiled. There are a lot of people around who can't wait to tell you what you've done wrong, but there aren't many fathers willing to take the time and effort to help you grow up

- Eph 6:10 MSG--God is strong, and he wants you strong. So take everything the Master has set out for you, well-made weapons of the best materials. And put them to use so you will be able to stand up to everything the Devil throws your way.
- Hope
 - Biblical hope is more than wishful thinking but it is a confident expectation of goodness now and in the future; it never disappoints because it's based on God's faithfulness (1680)
 - Heb 6:18-19 NLT-- We who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God's inner sanctuary.
 - Rom 5:5 NLT-- This hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.
 - "We have the hope that God is producing the image of Christ in us right now. That's a great thing! And this hope is a certainty, not just a possibility. We are being changed. We see ourselves changing. We are becoming more like Jesus. We can see that we are more thoughtful, more compassionate, more loving. We are being mellowed. We are becoming like Christ -- stronger, wiser, purer, more patient. To our amazement, a certainty grows in our hearts that God is doing his work just as he promised. He is transforming us into the image of his Son." (R. Steadman)
- Love
 - Scripture portrays a lavish outpouring of God's love that overflows in such abundance that it renews our hearts with the truth of the Lord's presence and favor. (Strong's G26 & 1632)
 - "Your hope, rooted in the genuineness of your proven faith, will not disappoint you. And you can know this because the Holy Spirit has come into your life and has begun to pour the love of God experientially into your heart. This is not mainly an argument. This is mainly a personal experience of God's love flooding the heart with an immediate sense of God's reality and love." (Bible Knowledge Commentary)
 - Rom 8:38 NLT-- I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love.
 - Ps 22:4-5 NAS-- In You our fathers trusted; they trusted and You rescued them. To You they cried out and they fled to safety; in You they trusted and were not disappointed.
- In a world where the culture seeks to avoid pain and disappointment at any cost, we observe a corresponding lack of endurance, character, and hope.
- Our heavenly Father deals with us on the basis of grace not works. His perfect love for us involves not only comfort and care but healing and training as well.
- Rom 12:1-2 MSG-- So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.
- Insights:

PERSONAL APPLICATION**A. ONE THING**

The One Thing that I'd like to take away from today's class and believe God to accomplish in my life is:

B. PONDER THE TRUTH

- Which verse stood out to you this week? Write it out below and take some time to review it often. Be still and expectant in God's presence, alert for new insights. Write them down.

C. PRAY IT IN

Take your One Thing and your verse and turn them into a prayer:

"Lord, where do You want to apply these truths to my particular life circumstances?"

"What are some specific strategies for incorporating this truth into my thinking and actions?"

D. PRAISE IT IN

- Use music to help you engage your emotions. It will assist you in taking the truth from your head to your heart.

E. PERSONALIZE IT

Prayerfully consider these questions, asking the Spirit to guide you into a deeper understanding of the truth and to reveal His pathway for growth. Keep a written record.

- Which of these benefits do you need the most? Think about ways that your life would be better if you experienced more of it. Record your thoughts:

- Bolster hope and contentment in life by trying these faith steps this week. Take notes on what you experienced:
 - Thank God for this pressure that provides you with an opportunity to know Him more and to be more like Him. Invite Him to bring forth both the holy and unhealthy within you and be attentive to how He answers that prayer.

 - Rejoice in the benefits Scripture says can be yours by praising God for His perfect love and faithfulness. Write a prayer, sing a song, or do something creative to help you get in touch with the joy set before you.

 - Reframe the meaning of waiting on God – choose to see these hardships as a training ground with a desired goal vs. something that you want to end as soon as possible.

 - Allow yourself to explore a sense of wonder. “I wonder what good thing God has in store for me today” or “I wonder what new attribute of the Lord I’ll get to know through all this.”

 - Ask the Holy Spirit to bless your eyes to see God’s love in ways you’ve never recognized it before.

- Continue practicing Listening prayer to uncover what’s below the surface of your discontentment or false hopes. Here are the basic steps:
 1. *“Help me, Father, identify my most predominant feelings around this situation:”*
Get in touch with these emotions and be present to them as you come to God in prayer.
 2. *“Lord, please bring to your mind a time when I felt these same feelings.”* It can be a:
 - Specific memory
 - Environment that you experienced over and over in the past
 - Symbolic mental picture
 - Persistent feelings with no memory attached
 3. *“Holy Spirit, I ask you to show me what is the message I came to believe at this time?”*
 4. *“Jesus, what is the truth here?”*