



## \*NEW YEAR'S REVOLUTION: “Endurance”

Biblical Text: Romans 5:1-5

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\*I love the Beatles, but you know that. Once I saw them play back in the day, I was hooked. \*And this song made a good theme for this series. \* (play clip.) (sing along if you know it...) I know that guitar line was just too much for a few of you who didn't like their music back when - and for some who were born after the Beatles got old - but hey, that blast from the past was fun for some of us.

But, here's the thing. We may all want to change the world, but changing anything just isn't easy! Resolutions, big or small, are hard because change is hard. \*Most of us prefer what we know, even if it isn't really working. Most of us don't really even like to change a light bulb! **Change is such hard work!**\*

And it turns out there's a reason for that. Change requires us to use our brains, \*our cortex, to think differently so we can act differently. That's hard in times of change because our emotions and anxiety are triggered by uncertainty.

Neuroscience tells us that when we are anxious, we revert to our \**“limbic brain”* which is all about survival, fight or flight, and on alert for danger. The technical name is the \**paleo-mammalian* brain. The non-technical name is \***lizard brain**. And we are not at our best in our lizard brain rather than our cortex.<sup>1</sup> So if you find yourself reacting rather than thinking - **lizard brain**.

\*Park that information over here for just a minute – and let's review where we've been in the series. We've been looking at 5 components that help move us forward: \***Identity** - **Capacity** – **Motivation** – **Endurance** – and **Security**.

So, we claimed our \***identity** - we are made \**imago Dei* in the image of God. We looked at our \***capacity** - the gifts and graces we each were given\* when we were created by God. And we talked about \***motivation** - staying encouraged, helping us keep \*believing in God and in ourselves.

Today, I want to talk about \***endurance**, and a very similar word, \***persistence** – both are about how we keep on going when we hit the wall and things get tough. The times we are tempted to run away, throw in the towel, or give up.

<sup>1</sup> From the *Neuropsychologist: A Journal of Neuroscience and Psychology*, in the article “The Limbic System.”

\*Endurance is a big deal for distance runners and for all the rest of us too. \*  
And as it turns out that the prospect of change isn't the only thing that engages our \*limbic brain. Our “fight or flight” reflex engages when times are toughest.

That's probably why our ancestors more than 150 years ago picked \* **“Ad Astra per Aspera”** – to the stars through difficulty - as our Kansas State motto.<sup>2</sup> It took some grit and faith to keep on going through dust-storms, drought and worse on the frontier. It still takes that today, whether it's surviving the Kansas-Kansas State basketball game, or the more difficult challenges of life.

\*It also is why there are so many references to endurance and persistence in the New Testament. It's not easy to be a Christian, when times are tough.

\*James 1:2-3 says **“...consider it joy whenever you face trials of any kind, because you know the testing of your faith produces perseverance...”**<sup>3</sup>

Anybody there yet – considering trials and troubles a source of joy? I've been a Christian a long time, and I'll admit I'm still working on that one. That's hard.

But I'm all in on \*Hebrews 12:1-2: **“Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, looking to Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith...”**<sup>4</sup>

I promise you that God wants to help us persevere and endure any trials and difficulties – whatever the race is we're running, walking, rolling or crawling!

I learned this a long time ago: **“In the economy of God, no pain we suffer, no trial we experience, is ever wasted.”** I believe that. And so did the Apostle Paul.

\*So, open your Bibles with me to Romans 5. Our text this morning is all about the work that God does in us to develop spiritual strength as we experience times of difficulty. As you turn there, Romans is the 6th book into the New Testament, right after the Gospels and Acts. We're in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter today.

As you find your place, I want to share something important about our times of difficulty and trials. They are not caused by God. \*II Peter 3:9 says: **“...it is not the will of God that any should suffer or perish, but that all should come into the joy of salvation...”**<sup>5</sup> But God is at work in every time of trial.

\*Romans 5 tells us some of the ways God works in our hardest times.

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<sup>2</sup> From “The Great Seal of the State of Kansas” from the Kansas Historical Society.

<sup>3</sup> James 1:2-3, paraphrased by the author.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Hebrews 12:1-2, paraphrased by the author.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. II Peter 3:9, paraphrased and amplified by the author.

Look at Romans 5:1: ***\*“...since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...”***<sup>6</sup> That’s where it all begins. Facing trials without faith is like entering combat without armor, or braving the winter without a coat.

How does that happen? Look at verse 2: ***\*“...through Christ we have obtained access to his grace and boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.”***<sup>7</sup> In Christ we have peace, grace, forgiveness, and the ability to boast in God’s glory.

I love how Eugene Peterson puts it in the Message, ***\*in Christ, “We find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand—out in the wide open spaces of God’s grace and glory, standing tall and shouting our praise.”***<sup>8</sup>

But it isn’t all glory. In the other times, especially the hard times, God does the character building work in us that develops the muscles of our faith that we need to endure. Listen to how Paul puts it in verse three: ***\*“... not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings...”***<sup>9</sup> Don’t misunderstand, it’s not that we say, *“Hey look how bad things are for me. Let me tell you about my latest troubles.”*

If I were to paraphrase it, he’s saying: ***“Because of Christ’s suffering, our sufferings and trials are a badge of honor...”***<sup>10</sup> He understands. He’s been there.

***\*Then Paul turns to the essence of his teaching for Christians who will all, sooner or later, experience difficulties. Verses 3-5 tell us what God does with our times of trial: “... suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us...”***<sup>11</sup>

Let me read that again, more slowly. ***\*\*\*\*\**** Our trials and difficulties are a training ground for a faith that lasts, and endures. God will never disappoint us.

***\*Verse 5 - His love never fails us. His Spirit is our source of strength.***

Are hard times easy. No. Can we endure them, can we persevere? Yes, with the help of God, who will never fail you. Will they leave us scarred? Yes, sometimes. But, in the words of Dr. Rodney A. Winters, ***“Our scars are not signs of weakness, they are signs of persistence, endurance and the will to live.”***

And the place that comes from, the only place I know, is God. Let us pray.

<sup>6</sup> Romans 5:1. *New Revised Standard Version*®. Copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>7</sup> Op. Cit. Romans 5:2, paraphrased by the author.

<sup>8</sup> Romans 5:2, *The Message (MSG)* Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002 by Eugene H. Peterson

<sup>9</sup> Op. Cit. Romans 5:3, *New Revised Standard Version*.

<sup>10</sup> Op. Cit. Romans 5:3, paraphrased by the author.

<sup>11</sup> Op Cit. Romans 5:3-5, *New Revised Standard Version*.