down. God has no beef with us. The past is forgiven, the present is in process, and the future is in God’s hand. We may worry about a lot of things, but we need not worry about our relationship with God. We are justified!

***Faith*.**  The text says, “We are justified *by faith*…” Justification is possible because we are people of faith. Faith is part of the justification conversation; the blessings of God are accessed by and through faith. *“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*” (Hebrews 11:1). Faith is a gift we can possess and exercise regardless of our education, wealth, or station in life.

David Foster Wallace tells a story about faith. Two guys sit in a bar in the remote Alaskan wilderness. One is religious, the other an atheist, and they are arguing about the existence of God. The atheist says: “Look, it’s not like I don’t have actual reasons for not believing in God. Just last month I got caught away from the camp in a terrible blizzard, and I was totally lost and I couldn’t see a thing, and it was 50 below, and so I tried prayer: I fell to my knees and cried out ‘Oh, God, if there is a God, I’m lost in this blizzard, and I’m gonna die if you don’t help me.’” The religious guy looks at the atheist, puzzled. “Well then you must believe now,” he says, “After all, here you are, alive.” The atheist rolls his eyes. “No, man, all that happened was a couple guys wandered by and showed me the way back to camp.”

For Wallace, the difference is a matter of perspective which comes “from *inside* the two guys. As if a person’s most basic orientation toward the world, and the meaning of his experience were somehow just hard-wired…As if how we construct meaning were not actually a matter of personal, intentional choice.” The nonreligious guy chose to dismiss the possibility that the passing Eskimos had anything to do with his prayer for help. The faith-filled guy chose to see his bar mate’s rescue as an answer from God. Thomas Aquinas put it this way: “To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary. To one without faith, no explanation is possible.” For people of faith, the only choice is God: it is God who gives life, God who provides, God who forgives, and God who redeems.

***Peace*.**Justification led us to faith, and now we are at peace. We have peace with God when God agrees to give up the quarrel, to tear up our debts, to cancel our sins. When we have the faith to accept God’s offer of reconciliation, “*we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (v. 1). If we have peace with God, God has peace with us. We might rewrite this verse, “Since we are justified by faith, God is at of peace with us through Jesus Christ.”

Chinese philosopher Wu Hsin wrote: “What is called peace by many is merely the absence of disturbance. True peace cannot be disturbed; It resides beyond the reach of disturbance.” God’s peace is more than the absence of conflict; it is the healing power that makes us whole. Nothing, says Paul, not hardship, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, or the sword can take that peace from us. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus which is our peace. Justification. Faith. Peace. Terms freighted with theological significance which teach us about our relationship with God.

**Managing in a World of Despair.** Then, Paul switches to the here and now, addressing the question: “How do justified Christians, enjoying peace with God by faith in Jesus Christ, live in the real world of suffering, crisis, persecution, distress, and anxiety?” Back to our text:*“wealso boast in our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us”* (5:1-5)*.* The hyperlinks are: Sufferings; Endurance; Character; Hope; Love; Holy Spirit.

***Suffering*.** Many biblical characters suffered unjustly. Abel suffers death at the hands of his brother Cain. Joseph is sold by his brothers into slavery. The Hebrews suffered in Egypt as slaves for 400 years. The prophets suffered harassment. Women and resident aliens suffered without rights or recourse. Jesus suffered torture and crucifixion, and predicted suffering for those who followed him and his teachings.

Peter wrote, “*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you*” (1 Peter 4:12). Suffering is a truth universally acknowledged. The early Christians suffered physical torments at the hands of authorities; facing down impatient crowds and bloodthirsty mobs who feared this “new way.” People the world over still face threats because of the color of their skin, religious beliefs, or gender. We understand suffering and the words of the Proverb: “*Even in laughter the heart may ache, and rejoicing may end in grief*.” (14:13). Yet, embedded in the discussion of suffering is a link that reveals a positive byproduct to suffering!

***Endurance*.**Paul states that suffering produces endurance (or perseverance). Paul’s reference is to a person who not only endures, but to someone who has *super*-endured. The Greek word here is*hupomenó;* theroot is *menó,* meaning to abide or endure. Adding the prefix *hupo* intensifies the meaning, indicating someone who is truly brave, who stands courageously. For Paul, a persevering character that stems from a place of suffering approaches superpower quality!

A person with such endurance learns how to gut it out daily. I think of Louis Zamperini, an Olympic runner who survived for weeks adrift in a raft on the Pacific Ocean during World War II. The Japanese captured Zamperini and brutally beat him in a POW camp. Zamperini survived his ordeal; he endured, unbroken by the experience. This is extra- ordinary and super-ordinary endurance that emerges from great suffering. This is heroic stuff. Such suffering-forged endurance builds character.

***Character*.** It is widely reported that character is who you are and how you behave when no one is looking. But if no one is looking, then no one can evaluate your character. Paul’s word, *dokime-n,* means the kind of character forged in “the school of hard knocks.” It is like metal or a precious gem that goes through a trial by fire to test its worth. Character is not *just* who we are or what we are when no one is looking. Character is also who we are while probed, vetted, observed, examined, and tested, with the results shown to all. When we are proven by our suffering and the endurance of it to be authentic and genuine, that is character; and “*character produces hope*” (v. 4).

***Hope*** refers both to what is unseen and to the future (Rom. 8:24-25). The New Testament speaks of hope as: the joyous anticipation of good or something positive (Titus 1:2; 1 Peter 1:21); having “Christ in you” (Col. 1:27); resting in Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 1:1); grasping the resurrection (Acts 23:6); holding fast to the promises made to our ancestors (Acts 26:6-7); righteousness (Gal. 5:5); something “promised by the gospel” (Colossians 1:23); “sharing the glory of God” (Rom. 5:2 ); “blessed” (Titus 2:13); “salvation” (1 Thess. 5:8); and “eternal life” (Titus 1:2; 3:7). Paul is very clear about hope. Those who suffer may endure and develop good character which spills over with hope. These hyperlinks of the faith are by no means exhaustive, but they provide an excellent start to understanding both our relationship with God and the world in which we live and work, all the while endeavoring to be faithful to the will of God as we know and understand it.

Prayer: Faithful God, how wonderful to know that we have peace with You through faith in Jesus. Thank you for Your grace and mercy towards us. Like Paul, we want to rejoice in our sufferings, which are only for a moment, in the knowledge that the joy set before us is sure and founded on Your unchangeable promises. Thank You for our salvation and the hope that we have in Jesus. Give us teachable spirits and a willingness to rejoice, no matter what difficulties we face. May our lives be a testimony to Your goodness and grace. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

**Sources:**

* Klein, Gary. “The invention of hyperlinks.” *Psychology Today*, psychologytoday.com, January 4, 2018. Retrieved October 23, 2021.
* Wallace, David Foster, excerpt from commencement address, “This Is Water,” at Kenyon College, 2005. <https://fs.blog/2012/04/david-foster-wallace-this-is-water/>. Retrieved June 6, 2022.

**Hyperlinks of Faith**

Sunday, June 12, 2022 [Romans 5:1-5](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+5%3a1-5&language=en&version=NIV)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN Psalm 8

American writer and professor, David Huddle wrote: “Everything is connected, and nothing is without consequence.” Any search on the world wide web will bear this out because every page on the internet now contains hyperlinks. A hyperlink is an icon, graphic or text (usually in blue and underlined) that “links” the user to another website, image, or video with just a click or a tap. The world wide web is one great network of hyperlinks connecting trillions of pages and files to one another. When I read the passage from Romans, I find two sets of theological hyperlinks: the first (vv. 1-2) concerns our relationship with God; the second (vv. 3-5) deals with how to cope in the real world without dissolving in despair.

**Our Relationship with God.** *Therefore, since we are justified by faith, wehave peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and weboast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.* There are eight links: Justified; Faith; Peace; God; Lord Jesus Christ; Grace; Hope; Glory. We’ll examine three.

***Justified*.** Some of us remember the shift from typewriters to computer word-processing. Among the many exciting features of this new technology was a little thing called “right justification.” With a typewriter, you started each new line along the left margin. When you ran out of space at the end of the line, you hit the return key or pulled the carriage-return lever from right to left. This simultaneously slid the carriage back to the left margin and rolled the paper up one line. On those old manual machines, you were rewarded with a reassuring “ding” from a hidden bell. Even if you typed everything perfectly, your right margin still looked ragged. But with word processors, you could align your text vertically along *both* margins. Suddenly, your letters and term papers looked neater, as if produced in a professional print shop.

Scripture promises that Christians are “justified by faith” (Romans 5:10). The ragged edges of our lives are rendered uniform, made smooth by the power of Christ’s saving death and resurrection. “*If we confess our sins*,” says 1 John 1:9, *“[God] who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness*.” If we listen closely enough to these words, we may just hear the reassuring “ding” of forgiveness God offers us.

Notice, too, that the apostle Paul says, “we *are* justified…” (v. 1). Many things may go wrong in our lives, we may face many problems; but God is not one of those problems. We are cool with God because in Christ Jesus everything is lined up, straightened out, and calmed