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Title: One Thing Leads to Another

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Text: [Romans 5:1-5](#)

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Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance

produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

My dad was generally pretty quiet and taught me things by actions more than words. Perhaps that's why I remember so clearly some of the actual verbal advice he did give to me. I remember shortly after getting my first car – a 1967 Pontiac LeMans by the way – I wanted to go for a drive but there was some winter weather starting in the area. He suggested I not go out. Knowing better and being wiser than my dad, I went out. Not more than 10 minutes later, this lovely rear-wheel-drive car was doing a couple of spins on the interstate entrance ramp before coming to rest against the guardrail. Next thing I know, Don Lytle pulled up behind me in his Kansas Highway Patrol car. Don's son, David, was a friend of mine and we went to the same church. Mr. Lytle got the car towed and gave me a ride home in the patrol car. On the way, he asked his dispatcher to call my parents and let them know I was OK.

When I got home, I had a conversation with my dad. I remember him saying – "you know – one thing leads to another. What you do will lead to something else which will lead to something else. The path you pick is important." That's the only part I remember but that was enough. It was clear that, at that moment, he was referring to the decision to go out in questionable weather which led to spin which led to the damage to the car which led to a repair bill for me which meant me working to pay for something that could have been avoided when I could have been working to pay for something I wanted. That was the lesson at the moment but it was a

lesson for life as well. Forks in the road determine the direction and the next fork and so on. All a chain reaction.

In 1980, NBC introduced a new television game show called just that - *Chain Reaction*. The show has appeared in different forms over the years, but the main idea has always been for different teams to fill in a chain of words. For example, the first word in a four-word chain might be "light," the last word "spring," with the team needing to guess the two words in-between. In this case, "light" comes from a light "bulb," and out of the bulb grows a "daffodil," which comes up in the "spring." It's a chain reaction of words, where one word leads to another, and "light" turns into "spring." ¹¹

In Romans 5, there is a chain reaction where it is clear that Paul is speaking that one thing leads to another. It begins in verse 3 with "suffering" and ends in verse 4 with "hope." How might suffering turn into hope? Is that kind of divine chain reaction really possible? Or is this just another word game that Paul has invented?

For Christians living in Rome, there was evidence of their suffering. Romans 8:35 mentions "hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword." Romans 12:12 directs its readers to "be patient in suffering," and Romans 12:14 adds the encouragement "bless those who persecute you." In the midst of hardship, distress, persecution, and peril — during that kind of suffering — how could they possibly have hope? Paul had a tall order to convince the Roman church that hope was still possible.

Today, we might well ask the same kind of question — perhaps not from the same kind of persecution for our faith, but from whatever troubles and afflictions that we might face in the world and our own lives. When violence erupts in any part of the world with all of the suffering it causes, how can we have hope? With the ongoing suffering of poverty, disease, and war in so many places around the world, how can we have hope? As we face our own personal challenges — raising our children in an increasingly complicated world, facing our aging and health issues, and confronting our mortality, how can we have hope? With the Romans long ago, we might also ask: Can suffering really lead to hope?

Are you familiar with the painting by G.F. Watts titled, HOPE? The image is of a woman sitting on a globe, blindfolded, with an instrument in her arms that appears to have lost all of its strings but one.

Seeing the image of the woman holding on to that stringed instrument made me wonder what she had encountered in her life. She looks like she has

suffered. She looks haggard. Look at the painting long enough and you wonder about her experiences, her joys and pains, disappointments, and joyful moments? Had she experienced life as being a series of failures and held onto the one thing that brought her promise...her instrument? It did not matter to her that the instrument was not complete as it was initially constructed to be. All of the strings to play that beautiful instrument were no longer in place; what was left was one lonely string. Only a single strand that could be played. One string that signified that all was not lost, there was still something to live for – to play for. But how to get from here to there was her dilemma. 2²

In a world or a society where we encounter so much negativity, we rarely see or experience individuals, communities, congregations, or nations who speak of a hope when all most people can point out is what might be missing. When seeing the painting, many people are apt to mention that the strings are not in place and comment on those that they can see that are broken, not complete, or not able to be played. They can't focus on the string that is being played by the woman. One string could give the instrument its integrity and give the woman the ability to make music. That one string provided HOPE that there was still promise of a different future for her and her instrument.

Those who have had to suffer for a worthy cause do not give up easily if at all. Progress in our society could not have come to be if suffering were to impede future movement. That woman was more than just a woman blindfolded and sitting upon a globe. She was more than what her feet or her dress may have suggested. She was a musician, one who was able to make beautiful music even with one string. She risked being defined by her character as being just that. Yes, she may have suffered, but she pushed on and continued on. She was a woman who God had called to do something different and something unique. Maybe that was what Paul was trying to say to the Roman people, that if you can endure the suffering and continue on to build the character of who you are, that there was hope on the other side.

As your pastors, we have a small window into what you are going through if you choose to tell us and allow us the privilege to walk along beside you in prayer. As I was writing this meditation, the prayer concerns that you submitted last week came across my email. While many of you registered your attendance, 59 of you also listed a prayer concern. We like that because it allows us to pray for you in this time. In those concerns, there was anxiety about what is happening in our country, there were health challenges, death of loved ones, loss of a job, COVID diagnosis, cancer diagnosis, move to a new home, children with mental illness – they run the gamut. And, even though there are 59 of them, I know that it's only a

fraction of the sufferings, the trials, the tribulations that you encounter, but I encourage you to keep on pushing through. Do not allow the things that once were, hold you back.

An adult Sunday school teacher once asked the question in class, "In your time of discouragement, what is your favorite Scripture?" A young man said, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Psalm 23:1."

A middle-aged woman said, "God is my refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Psalm 46:1."

Another woman said, "In this world, you shall have tribulations, but be of good cheer, I have overcome this world. John 16:33." Then Mr. John, who was 80 years old . . . stood up and said, "and it came to pass 85 times in the Bible." The class started to laugh a little thinking that Mr. John's memory was starting to fail. When the laughing stopped, he said:

- At 30 I lost my job with six hungry children and a wife to feed. I didn't know how I would make it.
- At 40 my eldest son was killed overseas in the war. It knocked me down.
- At 50 my house burned to the ground. Nothing was saved out of the house.
- At 60 my wife of 40 years got cancer. It slowly ate away at her. We cried together many a night on our knees in prayer.
- At 65 she died. I still miss her today.

"The pain I went through in each of these situations was unbelievable. I wondered where God was. But each time I looked in the Bible I saw one of those 85 verses that said, 'and it came to pass.' I felt that God was telling me, my pain and my circumstances were also going to pass and that God would get me through it." Then he said, "And it came to pass."³

That's an important lesson to learn. We can endure more than we think we can. With God's help, we will survive. Of course, for some of us, this truth will not be real until we go through a difficult time. Then we will know for certain that with God's help we can make it through terrible storms, and it will shape us and one thing will lead to another - "Suffering produces endurance; endurance produces character, and character produces hope."

The lady in the painting could have stopped and put down her instrument, saying, "I have but one string; what else can I do?" But she continued to play. Rather, she recognized that that one string was maybe God's instruction to her to keep on playing. Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Maybe that one string was to say that you have been defined to do this one unique thing in a way that somebody else may not be able to do. Recognize inside your heart that you too have been called to do something distinct and definitive. Maybe you feel, especially in this time, that God has given you but one string. Keep on playing, for we need to hear the music that God has given for you to play for us all because you know what? One thing leads to another.

¹ Wikipedia article on NBC show Chain Reaction.

² Information on HOPE found in weekly Day One broadcast from May 22, 2016 by The Reverend Charles L. Fischer, III titled Suffering to Hope and found at www.day1.org.

³ Illustration found in sermon by King Duncan titled, "A Squirrel Crossing a Busy Street" found at www.sermons.com