



Week 4: Expectant Living

February 27-March 5, 2022

Romans 8:18-25 | Chapters 8 & 9

This week we're going to examine suffering in the life of a believer. No one enjoys suffering. Yet, no one can escape suffering. All of us understand that suffering comes in unexpectedly and stays as long as it wants. It never knocks or gives us time to prepare for its grand entry, it just comes. It comes in the middle of a momentous occasion, a celebration, or in the most peaceful time of our lives. No one can ever truly prepare for suffering, but we can prepare to suffer well.

When have you seen something good or helpful come from a truly painful situation?

ROMANS 8:18-25

Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us. We were given this hope when we were saved. (If we already have something, we don't need to hope for it. But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.)

Suffering is part of living in a broken world, and we cannot control when suffering comes into our lives. Why does the unexpected nature of suffering make it so difficult to walk through?

There are a couple of lies people believe about suffering. First, some believe suffering happens because we've sinned and God is punishing us. While we certainly can suffer because of our sin, why is this often not the case? How might viewing suffering this way harm our relationship with God?

The second lie we believe about suffering is that if we're suffering and haven't sinned, God will reward our suffering. How does this lie actually make our suffering more painful?

Paul was a seasoned sufferer. He was beaten, mocked, imprisoned, shipwrecked, and left for dead all because he was trying to reach the known world with the gospel. Following Jesus intensified Paul's suffering, yet he was able to maintain a perspective that allowed him to suffer well.

Looking back at our scripture, how did Paul describe the reality of suffering?

What did Paul say about the certainty of our hope?

When you consider these observations together, what does it teach you about the nature of suffering as a child of God?

Paul was not concerned with answering the question of why Christians suffer. Rather, he wanted to put suffering in perspective. Paul considered the sufferings of this present time negligible when compared to the glory that will one day be revealed to us in heaven. At that time, our salvation will be complete, and we will be like Jesus (see [1 John 3:2](#)). Our future glorification will be the time when God delivers forever His people from sin's presence. Not only believers but creation itself, according to Paul, eagerly waits with anticipation for that day of glorification and freedom from sin's dominion.

What do you think it will be like to live without fear, pain or death? What do you think it will be like to live in the continual and direct presence of God?

Paul used the word "groan" three times in Romans 8 (vv. 22-23, 26). The whole earth is pregnant with labor pains. However, like a woman going through labor pains, our suffering is only momentary and will give way to indescribable joy. Suffering as a child of God is a painful privilege. Suffering is always painful, and that shouldn't be ignored. But it's also a privilege because suffering doesn't have the last word. Our present sufferings have a limited lifespan.

How does the analogy of childbirth help us see our suffering from a different perspective?

How have you experienced the groaning of creation recently? What news stories have given evidence of this reality?

How can we encourage one another to live in hope and patience as we and even creation face our present sufferings?

The real reward for our suffering is what God does in us and through us. There is an intimacy with God that happens amidst our suffering that only suffering can produce. It stabilizes our feet on solid ground and not sinking sand, and our souls are touched by the Creator Himself, who is present with us in our suffering.

PRAYER

Thank God for His work on the cross that is the ultimate example of His unwavering love for us. Thank Him for His continued faithfulness to His children. Pray that no matter what sufferings we face this week, we would be able to cling to the promises of Romans 8 and trust in His love for us.

COMMENTARY

Romans 8:18-25

8:18. Paul knew firsthand a degree of suffering that most of us cannot imagine ([2 Corinthians 11:23-28](#)). He must have wondered about the reason for these difficulties and perhaps wondered if somehow he could avoid them. He came to an inescapable and rational decision that his sufferings were not worth comparing with the glory that would be his in the future. Paul knew his ultimate destination was heaven. The reward of heaven would be for him far better both in terms of quality and of duration. He would not allow his focus in this life to be consumed by his suffering. He was always striving to keep an eye toward his ultimate reward.

8:19. The “glory” that will be revealed to us became the occasion for Paul to think about the redemption of all creation. By our sin, we have brought a great corruption into the world. Sin has stained everything. God’s concern and plan is to make all things right again, reflecting anew His original plan. Paul personified creation to indicate the extent of this redemption. God will cleanse every form of evil from His creation. God’s preeminent example of this regeneration is His sons who will be revealed. One day God’s children will be made perfectly into what God intended for them. We do not know exactly what all this will mean, but the beauty reflected by God’s children will resonate with the beauty of God’s entire universe. In this sense creation waits with anticipation, looking forward to the day when all of God’s creation will perfectly reflect His original plan.

8:20. For the creation was subjected to futility refers to the corruption of nature because of sin. [Genesis 3:17-19](#) describes the ruin that resulted from Adam and Eve’s sin and provides the

imagery for Paul's use of futility in this verse. The word can also be translated as "vanity" or "emptiness." It describes accurately the contrast between the fullness God intended and the emptiness that resulted from sin. Creation was stained by sin. Creation did not spin out of control, going off on its own, but was still subject to God. He remained sovereign though sin corrupted. God forced humanity to endure the consequences of sin because He would not allow sinful humanity to live in a perfect creation. For this reason, creation had to suffer as well. God did this, however, in hope. He had a plan to return to His original design.

8:21-22. The bondage of corruption again reflects the images of [Genesis 3:17-19](#). Just as sin enslaved humanity, it also bound creation and prevented the fulfillment of its purpose, testifying to all that God is. Though nature still testifies to "God's eternal power and divine nature" (1:20), we can only imagine what will happen once it is set free from all of sin's effects. This freedom coincides with the glorious freedom of God's children. Though wrong seems powerful, it is limited. Paul consistently had reminded his readers that suffering, affliction, and difficulties of every kind are not the last word in God's plan. Nor do they represent a frustration of God's plan. Joy will come.

8:23. To have the Spirit as the first fruits means to have the down payment on this future glory and joy. God's Spirit is present in Christians, God is at work in the creation, and His promises are being fulfilled. We know these truths, yet at the same time we groan within ourselves as we strain forward to the glorious future. The presence of sin pains Christians precisely because we have a clear hint of what God will bring about. We groan because we long for God to bring His plan to completion. Paul focused here on the redemption of our bodies. We experience the effects of sin in various ways. Sin takes a physical toll on us, and in fact physical death itself is a result of sin. Where we feel sin's effect most acutely, we also will experience God's blessing. Redemption means "purchased from bondage." God will liberate our bodies, restoring us to divine health that is both spiritual and physical.

8:24. Our salvation ushers us into an entirely new present and future. Paul described the regeneration of the entire created order and then affirmed it is in this hope we were saved. In English the word hope may refer to an uncertain possibility, as in hoping our team wins or a disease is cured. The Greek word has an altogether different meaning. Paul referred to Christian hope, which has no uncertainty. It is still in the future, not fully realized; but its reality is beyond question. Our future is secure because of what God has done through Jesus Christ. This is our certain hope.

8:25. Christians are saved, as the previous verse stated, but we look forward to the full realization of the meaning of being saved. We hope for what we do not see describes the abiding mind-set of a Christian. We eagerly wait describes our yearning. The necessary strength to embrace hope and continually wait is found in the word patience. Difficult circumstances may seem to be direct evidence for either God's lack of care or lack of ability. But this is not the case. Difficult circumstances simply call for our need to endure. Endurance and victory are often precisely the same.