

Waiting in Hope: *Suffering & Groaning as Sons & Daughters* Romans 8:17b-25

*‘...we **wait eagerly** for adoption as sons...for in this hope we were saved’*

Introduction: There are few rooms I’d rather be in than the dreaded **waiting room**. If you’ve ever had the privilege to sit in one with a family member, friend, or co-worker, you understand the feeling. It’s a place you did not want to or expect to be, it smells funny, typically has lousy snack or drink options, and time moves slower than anywhere else in the known universe. On top of this, you are anticipating the potential worst case scenarios as you sit in an uncomfortable seat with NOTHING to do except listen to your own thoughts and watch as smattering of colorful characters come in and out of the sliding glass door.

Why is waiting so difficult and excruciating? Why is it so hard for ALL of us? I’ve heard people describe themselves as ‘*good listeners*’ or ‘*engaging conversationalists*’, but never as someone ‘*really good at waiting*’. Waiting leaves us with a sense of a **loss of control**, where we feel powerless to DO or FIX the situation, putting the onus on someone else to resolve the situation. Waiting can encompass the anticipation of both the good and the bad, but either way can lead to **overthinking**, or at least thinking through the worst possible outcome. This level of **uncertainty** can bring on fear, which leads to anxiety, since our safety and comfort are threatened. Add this to the social conditioning of our present world: *we do not want to wait for ANTHING, from download speeds to coffee brewing*, we want what we want without the pesky nuisance of waiting.

As we come back to the text in **Romans 8**, Paul continues his flow of thought about the facets of the gospel and the implications in the total life of a believer. The gospel deals with our **past**, in the sense that we ALL started in a rebellious state, turning our back on the Creator for the worship of the creation (1:18-32), and we had no hope of changing or being made acceptable to God through our own works (3:20) since we were under sin. But God gave us a righteousness *apart from the Law* (3:21), which came from faith in Jesus Christ, whom God put forward as a **propitiation**, or satisfaction, or His wrath (3:24), so that God could look at sinful man through the work of Jesus Christ, and **justify** (declare righteous) them as RIGHTEOUS, possessing the righteousness of Christ, a foreign righteousness that came only through faith. This inevitably lead to **sanctification**, a process where a justified believer lives out obedience to the glory of God and becomes more and more like Jesus, since sin itself has no dominion over us, since we are under **grace** and not law (Rom. 6:15).

But we also know that we STILL battle the remnant or shadows of our flesh, and we understand the plight that Paul laid out that “*I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep doing*” (7:20), which is why he **thanks God through Jesus our Lord**, since there is now NO CONDEMNATION for those who are in **Christ Jesus** (7:25, 8:1). In order to both **fight our sin and bring assurance in life**, we are given the **Holy Spirit**, who indwells EVERY believer (8:9), LEADS us (8:14), and BEARS WITNESS that we are actually sons and daughters of God through adoption (8:16). Out of that assurance we know that we are **heirs with Christ of a future inheritance**. That knowledge of our future is what Paul addresses in this text, and deals with the reality of life on this side of eternity: **suffering, groaning, and waiting**.

The Problem & Purpose of Suffering

Romans 8:17 - “*and if children, then heirs ---- heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, **provided we suffer with Him** in order that we may also be glorified with him.*”

Suffering is a reality for every person on this planet since we live in a broken, sinful, and rebellious world. Our every instinct as humans is to **avoid suffering**, to pursue comfort, and to mitigate pain. But notice in this verse that **suffering is a condition in the pathway of glorification with Christ**. The word the ESV translates “*provided*” is the word that means “*since*”, or “*if indeed*”. In other words, suffering is NOT an optional or temporary status, but the inherent reality for every justified believer. So, it is NOT something to avoid or run from, but rather to bear up under and trust the Lord in.

Now, does scripture bear out this truth? Look at the following verses:

Luke 9:23-24 “And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and **take up his cross daily** and follow me. 24 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it”

2 Timothy 3:12 ‘Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus **will be persecuted...**’

1 Peter 4:13-14 “But rejoice insofar as you **share Christ’s sufferings**, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are **insulted** for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you”

Following Christ as His disciple is NOT a call to ease and pain-free living, but it requires us to proactively “take up our cross”, which was an instrument of painful death, to anticipate **persecution, insults, and other suffering** directly because of our relationship with Christ. Now, some may say: “*I’ve never faced this kind of suffering or persecution*”, which would be a revealer in some part to the way you live. If you live as if Christ is only a personal, hidden, secret Lord, of course persecution will be non-existent.

But the suffering Paul mentions here is MORE than merely being persecuted for being a Christian. Now, any suffering that is brought on by our own sin (like being a murderer, thief, meddler, or evil doer) is NOT suffering (1 Pet. 4:15), but only that which is according to God’s will (1 Pet. 4:19), since it will yield a greater dependency on Christ. We also are assured that our **enemy** is prowling like a roaring lion, looking to devour, and causing as much suffering as he can (1 Pet. 5:8-9). The point that Paul makes in the rest of the section is that fact that all of creation groans and suffers because of sin itself and its own corruption. This would signal that **suffering** is broader than persecution only, but includes *pain, trial, and loss*. That is why **John Piper** defined suffering as “*All the groaning that comes from the futility of this fallen age.*” But is there a difference between the suffering that I do as a Christian and my neighbor who suffers pain as an unbeliever? Piper again helps bring language and definition:

*“At root, the threat of all suffering is the same ---- whether it comes from human persecution or from Satanic attack or from natural disease or disaster --- namely, the threat that our **faith in God’s sovereign goodness will be destroyed**. In the end, the issue is not whether your pain is triggered by man, Satan, or nature, but whether you trust the sovereign goodness of God over it all and through it all to bring you to everlasting glory.”*

So believers and unbelievers will suffer in this world, but only one will see it as a purposeful reality from God’s hand. For those outside of Christ, they will view suffering as something detached from God (feels like God has left them --- if He exists at all), or that God is causing all it, or that there is *someone or something to blame for it*. But for a believer, we understand there is **purpose in suffering**. No parent likes to see their child go through pain. In fact, we wish we could bubble wrap our kids sometimes so that they don’t have to feel the inevitability of pain in this world. But we also know that every scraped

knee and broken heart and disappointing end to a class or game that bring tears and sorrow are part of maturing and growing up. We learn through pain. We grow in the midst of sorrow, and groaning, and uncertainty, and waiting. **What is the purpose?**

Romans 5:3-5 (cf. Acts 14:22) *“Not only that, but we **rejoice in our sufferings**, knowing that **suffering produces endurance**, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”*

Suffering is PRODUCING specific results in our lives: endurance, character, and hope, and all of this is reason to rejoice. **How does suffering produce endurance?** It knocks off the pride of self-trust, and grows us at the most valuable place: **faith**. It is why God Himself produces trials in our life, so that the genuineness of our faith, which is MORE VALUABLE than gold, will result in praise and honor and glory when Jesus comes (1 Pet. 1:6-7). Pride was the source of Adam and Eve’s sin, causing the creation to be subjected to sin, and pride is the source cause of our self-trust, desire to control, and clutching to our works for righteousness. So suffering helps us with a most important reality: **humility before glory, or humiliation before exaltation**. This was seen in so many of our examples that preceded us:

- **Abraham** – promised a multitude of descendants, blessing, and land, of which he never actually possessed in his lifetime (Heb. 11:8-9)
- **Moses** – spent 40 years as a fugitive shepherd in Midian before God called him to lead Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 2:15-25; Acts 7:29-30)
- **David** – was anointed king, and then went on the run in the Wilderness, being chased ruthlessly by Saul and His men
- **Paul** – was given a clear mandate: *bring the good news of the gospel to the Jews and then Gentiles, and I will show you how much you will suffer* (Acts 9:15-16); he also suffered from a messenger of Satan, which God DID NOT take away, so that he would boast in his weakness and depend on grace (2 Cor. 12:7-10; 2 Cor. 1:8-9).

But perhaps the clearest example is that of **Christ Jesus Himself** in Philippians 2:6-11, where we see **His humility on display**, coming as a servant rather than ruling King, so that He could give up His body on the cross. It was AFTER His death that God bestowed Him the name Lord and **highly exalted Him**, *where one day every knee will bow and tongue confess that **Jesus Christ is Lord!!!***

So suffering plays a **necessary purpose in the plans of God and the life of a follower of Jesus**, and thus it is conditional on our pathway to glorification. Suffering is both real and different for everyone, and if you are suffering today, you are in good hands. **Jon Bloom** insightfully observed this reality:

“Nothing reveals the humbled, loving, faithful hearts of redeemed children of God like the bewildering, disorientating, painful experiences of humiliation suffering, futility, and groaning.”

Now, as a good Father, God gives the *reason* for our suffering, but also promises that our **groaning in it WILL END**. Suffering has a shelf-life, and it will usher in something far greater.

The Passing Nature of Suffering

Romans 8:18 *“For I consider that the **sufferings** of this **present time** are **not worth comparing** with the **glory** that is to be revealed to us”*

Arguments of ‘lesser to greater’ in the midst of struggle can be dangerous but are effective. How many have pushed themselves physically in **preparing** for or **running a marathon** and push through the pain of the moment for the satisfaction of finishing the race. Or how many **parents** have encouraged their child to keep practicing the instrument so that they could be proficient in the future. Or a **coach** pushing for another rep on the bench press, pushing to the threshold, so that muscle will be produced for athletic endeavor. The only **danger** is that the payoff is not worth the pain, in which case the desire to give up or give in *sets in*. But Paul is making the case that in comparing **temporary pain from suffering** does not touch the glory to be revealed! To the degree that we believe that is to the degree that we will live in **the hope and joy that are offered to us**.

Paul used the same line of reasoning in his letter to the Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 *“**So we do not lose heart**. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For **this light momentary affliction** is **preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison**, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are **transient**, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”*

Paul *almost* seems like he is downplaying the nature of his affliction, but is only *seems* that way. This is either sarcasm or massive understatement. He knew suffering and physical affliction (see 2 Cor. 11:23-29) in greater ways than we will ever experience, but he was making the point: even getting *beaten with rods, whipped to an inch of his life, shipwreck, stoning, and constant danger* were all **light** by comparison of the glory that awaits. In fact, all of that suffering was **preparatory**, getting his heart and mind ready for eternity and off of this world.

Again, every person in this room can resonate with suffering, and many are going through the wringer right now. In no way does the Bible make light of your pain nor does God diminish it. But the danger we have with this kind of comparison that Paul makes and will make is that we **don’t believe what is to come is actually better**. If the future is NOT CATEGORICALLY BETTER, then our hope will be low, joy extinguished, and motivation gone. So Paul lays out in no uncertain terms **why the future is incomparable to our present suffering**.

The Power of Hope in Suffering

*For the **creation** waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the **creation** was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the **creation** itself will be **set free** from its bondage to corruption and obtain the **freedom of the glory** of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole **creation** has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. 23 And not only the **creation**, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we **wait eagerly** for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this **hope** we were saved. Now **hope** that is seen is not **hope**. For who **hopes** for what he sees? 25 But if we **hope** for what we do not see, we **wait for it with patience**.*

What we look forward to and where we pin our hope is a revealer of *how we will handle suffering*. If we HOPE that this world will get better, through politics or financial planning, we will always see suffering as something to avoid and as a negative act of a not-so-good God. If our HOPE of heaven is what we get

and the people we'll see, it will fall short of a motivating reality in the midst of pain. So Paul uses the **creation itself as a personification of suffering and hope.**

CREATIONS PLIGHT – Creation itself was NOT supposed to be this way, or at least it did not start out this way. It was created perfectly, eager to give its yield to the glory of God and dominion of man, working with Adam, not against him. But when sin invaded in Genesis 3:1-6, everything changed. Thorns and thistles now proliferated, the ground itself being **cursed**, and the dust itself enveloping the dead corpses of mankind (Gen. 3:17-19). This was NOT a choice that Creation made, but was brought on by God's plan and man's sin. Now, Creation **groans** compared to childbirth (which ironically was the curse to women in the Fall – Gen. 3:16). Only a mother and slightly scared father know the groans and screams during labor, a process that yields glory and beauty, but is itself gory and ugly. This is why we are NOT trying to save this planet, since it is awaiting something dramatic and transformational in the future.

CREATIONS HOPE – Creation knows that in order to be set free from the **'bondage to corruption'**, the true sons of God will need to be revealed. This will happen in the future, when Jesus returns and rules and reigns with His people and the present earth will be dissolved in fire and reborn as a New Heaven and Earth (2 Pet. 3:10-13; Rev. 21:1). It is then, and only then, that Creation will be free to function like it was intended, although we can build a case that it will be EVEN better than was experienced in the Garden of Eden.

BELIEVERS HOPE – How does this overlay and translate to a believers' life of hope in the midst of suffering and groaning?

- Just like Creation, we are waiting for the **freedom of glory** (8:21). We will not only be able to see the glory of God and live, but we will **experience glory**, as C.S Lewis stated in "The Weight of Glory", *'it can hardly be put into words ---- to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it.'* This freedom not only allows us to see the beauty of Christ with unveiled faces, but it also means we'll be able to serve Him without the anchor of the flesh! Perhaps one of the reasons why future glory is not as appealing to us is that we are not dog tired from killing our sin, or have become too comfortable with sinful habits that we miss sweet communion with Christ. The freedom of glory that awaits is the opportunity to worship purely and wholly, with no distracted hearts and minds and no amount of a divided heart (Ps. 86:11)
- We hope for the full expression of **adopted sons and daughters**. It is true that we have received the gift of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but He is only the first fruit of our full redemption. Though the firstfruits were the best of the harvest, they only signaled the rest was to come. The Holy Spirit is a **down payment, a promise, a guarantee, a foretaste of the glory to come**. The engagement ring is great, and often costs more than the wedding ring, but it is only a signal of something future. The Holy Spirit guarantees for us the completion of our salvation, **full redemption as sons and daughters, that will culminate in our new bodies** (8:23). Why do we need new bodies? We need bodies built for eternity, imperishable, glorified (1 Cor. 15:41-49) so that we can serve and glorify God forever.

"For in this hope we were saved!" – Salvation was NEVER just about our life in the present, but about the full redemption of our souls and bodies to be with Christ. That is the greatest anticipation for our future: TO LIVE IS CHRIST, TO DIE IS GAIN (Phil. 1:21) --- If living is Christ, then dying is gain, since Christ is the reward. Being with Christ is the hope that we bank our lives on and are willing to endure suffering,

pain, and groaning until then. Can we see it now?!?? Of course not, since **“hope that is seen is not hope”**. But it is in the hope of the freedom of glory, the full adoption as sons, and the presence of Christ that we **“wait for it with patience”** (8:25).

I’ll leave us with two key texts that say it better than I can as to where and why we hope for glory one day and willingly and patiently endure suffering:

1 John 3:2-3 *“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears **we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.** 3 And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”*

Revelation 21:1-5 *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, **“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.** ⁴ He will **wipe away every tear** from their eyes, and **death shall be no more**, neither shall there be **mourning**, nor **crying**, nor **pain anymore**, for the former things have passed away.”*

⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, **“Behold, I am making all things new.”**