

Present Suffering and Future Glory

Suffering is part of life. And suffering is hard. Whether it is physical, mental, emotional or relational, many of us are suffering now. And the rest of us can expect that at some point, life in this world will mean suffering for us as well. How can we move through life well in a world that involves suffering? The Apostle Paul, who writes this passage, never trivialized his own suffering; he never pretended that it wasn't painful or real (2 Cor. 11:23f). Rather he was a realist about his present suffering. But he was also a realist about his future glory. And it is this hope of future glory that can help us endure our suffering.

Opening Question: "Suffering has been part of my life." On a scale from 1 – 10 how much would you agree with this statement? (1 = very little suffering; 10 = significant suffering)

Read Romans 8:18-25

1. How does this passage connect to the previous section?
2. How does Paul encourage us to think about our suffering?

Steve said:

When Paul says that he "considers" that present suffering isn't worthy to be compared to future glory, he is saying that this is his reasoned conclusion. He has added up all the evidence and concluded this . . . It's not that present sufferings are trivial; it's that future glory is more weighty than we ever imagined. The Hebrew word for glory actually had the connotation of weightiness and substance. The gods of the nations were light-weights, but the God of Israel was a heavy-weight; He had **glory**. Paul looked forward to the day when we would both **see** and **share** God's glory.

3. Do you find it challenging to see (to "consider") your present suffering in light of future glory? Why or why not?
4. How many times does Paul mention hope in this passage? What does he say about hope? And what is real hope?

Steve said:

By definition, a “hope” involves something in the future that you don’t yet see. As NT Wright says, “One does not anxiously scan the horizon for a boat already in port.” But we do eagerly scan the horizon for the return of Christ and our full adoption as children of God. As Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:13, “. . . *fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*” We persevere through this life, believing that present suffering doesn’t begin to compare with the glory that we will see and experience at the return of Christ. It seems to me that we need an extra measure of discernment in applying a Scripture such as this one to our lives. We need to cling to this vision of our eventual glory without letting go of other Scriptures.

5. What might it mean for you to “cling to this vision of our eventual glory” in the midst of your suffering? Practically, how can we do this?

6. Steve suggested that as we deal with suffering that it is “okay to groan” (v. 23). It is okay to acknowledge that some things won’t be fixed in this life. Why is it helpful to do this?

Steve said:

We experience the nearness of God directly through the Spirit. But we also experience the nearness of God through His people. Sometimes we push others away during our suffering, but we need to let at least a few others stay close enough so that they can help bear our burdens. We need to let others grieve our losses with us and remind us that we do not grieve as those who have no hope.

7. Why do you think we sometimes push others away during our suffering?

8. How have you experienced the nearness of God through His people in the midst of suffering?