

Three Encouraging Truths About Suffering and Glory

By Daryl Wingerd



If you are a Christian, you need not fear or dread suffering. In fact, when suffering is one day viewed from the perspective of your future in eternal glory, you will be thankful for it.

Please don't misunderstand. No one enjoys suffering, or seeks out suffering, or hopes for suffering, or wants other believers to suffer.

Whether due to illness, or injury, or economic circumstances, or great personal loss, or persecution, suffering is something we all hope to avoid.

But as I said, suffering in the life of a true follower of Christ is ultimately a blessing and never a curse. I can say this with confidence for three reasons, all of them grounded in Paul's words in Romans Chapter 8.

Suffering Magnifies Glory

Paul says in 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."

When Paul said "not worth comparing," he wasn't minimizing the difficulty of suffering or implying that someone is weak who feels crushed by it. Of all people, Paul knew the pain of suffering, both from causing it for other believers before he knew Jesus (Acts 8:1-3; 26:11; Gal. 1:13; 1 Tim. 1:13), and from experiencing it in full measure as an apostle of Christ (cf. Acts 9:16; 2 Cor. 11:23-30). His point was not to minimize the pain of suffering but to magnify the glory that follows it.

Think of a number line. Zero is in the middle, with negative numbers to the left and positive numbers to the right. If the worst human suffering rates a *minus* 100 on that scale, glory is not merely a *positive* 100 on the other end. Glory doesn't just balance things out. Glory is off the scale completely — incomparably glorious to the other extreme! In that sense, "the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing" with future glory.

As a suffering follower of Christ, your pain will not merely be compensated for — like being paid back what you are owed at the resolution of a civil dispute. No matter how deep or longstanding or severe, your sufferings will be made to fade into utter obscurity

when viewed in the light of glory. And while you are here, especially while you are suffering, remember that just as the astronomer can see farthest and most clearly into the universe from the darkest places on earth, you can see most clearly the beauty and greatness of future glory from the darkest moments of your suffering.

Suffering Prepares You for Glory

In Romans 8:28 Paul assures us that "for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." We can easily feel the good when things are going well. The challenge is to recognize God's good purposes when life is difficult and painful. This is exactly why Paul said "*all* things." Not just the good things, but "*all* things," even suffering, "work together for good." It's helpful to remember that earlier in the same letter Paul described Christians as people who "rejoice in hope of the glory of God." He then continued, "More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope. . ." (5:2-5).

Believer, your suffering is not without purpose. God is using it to strengthen in you the hope in which you rejoice — the hope of glory. Just as the athlete's often-painful training equips him with the endurance and confidence needed to finish the race, God is causing *all* things — even your most painful suffering — to build in you the enduring character and confident hope that keeps you believing all the way to glory.

Suffering Cannot Separate You from Glory

Suffering believers can be tempted to believe God has abandoned or rejected them; that he does not love them; that their hope of glory is misguided and empty and vain. Nothing could be further from the truth.

As Paul asks in Romans 8:35, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" He then answers his own question, dispelling your fears of rejection or futility in the process: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:35-39). Suffering may indeed separate you from many things, but it could never separate you from God's love or the hope of glory!

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