

Suffering in Light of Eternity

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Three key words that are woven in and out of Romans 8 like 3 silver threads that hold it all together.

- **'Hope'** 6x in verses 20, 24, 25.
- **'Wait'** 3x in verses 19, 23, 25.
- **'Groan'** 3x in verses 22, 23, 26.

Paul is describing a Three-Fold Cord that gives you strength to persevere in the face of pain and suffering.

Apart from the grace of God and the work of Christ in your life all you'll ever be aware of is groaning. Groaning is the only one of the three that we start off with by nature.

It's **ONLY** the grace of God through His Spirit that lives **IN** you and His Word that speaks **TO** you that gradually begins to build a theology of suffering by adding these two other cords – waiting and hoping.

I. This Groaning that Our Passage Speaks of is Internal, Universal, and it Grows Louder and Louder the Older You Get

This groaning simply means that you've lived long enough to suffer and to see others around you that you care about suffer.

II. The Human Response to this Groaning is Quite Varied and Really Hinges on Your View of God in the Midst of it All

You have to determine whether or not there's a God. If you allow for God, you still have to decide where to PLACE this God – inside of or outside of your pain. And even if you place this God inside the circle of your pain as One who has tasted it and can suffer with you, you still have to decide whether or not this God has done something fundamental to redeem your pain and suffering... and to conquer it once and for all.

But if you don't want to deal with God, there are some alternatives:

A. You Can Try to Mask the Groaning with Distractions and Prescriptions

But at the end of the day none of it works! You still come up groaning because groaning is our internal and universal default setting!

B. Even as a Christian You Can Try to Deny the Groaning But You'll Have to Ignore 60% of the Bible

If you head down this path, you're going to have to create your own little 'Happy' formula with a smattering of Bible verses sprinkled through it.

But you'll have to ignore a whole lot of verses – as well as entire books of the Bible - like Job, Lamentations, I & 2 Peter, Hebrews and Revelation. These were all books that were written to Christians who were suffering and groaning – and desperately needed to know how to persevere in the face of real pain!

C. You Can Embrace the Groaning with a Heart Full of Hope Because of the Presence and Promises of God in the Very Midst of Your Groaning

In other words, God steps inside your circle of pain and groans with you. You're never alone, and He's given you reasons for hope in the midst of your suffering and groaning.

1. Your groaning pales in comparison to the glory that is coming your way!

Romans 8:18 "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Paul is saying, "calculate / consider / compute / analyze / take a serious look at it. If you do this right, there's no comparison!" It's not even close. Your future glory wins hands-down!

2. Your groaning is no accident but is by design – so it's not the result of a cold, random, godless universe that just slammed into you

Romans 8:20 "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope."

We are not where we are in this fallen, broken world filled with groaning because Satan has the upper hand. While we don't get all the details we'd like, we do see Paul clearly affirming that all this sin, and sorrow, and brokenness did not just trump God's original plan... and God is certainly not just playing clean-up. God takes full credit for it. Where we are today is still part of His sovereign plan, and He has a greater, redemptive, and hope-filled purpose for all of this."

Romans 8:28-30 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

What a contrast to the kind of hope that atheist, Richard Dawkins, peddles when he says...

"In a universe of blind physical genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, and other people are going to get lucky; and you won't find any rhyme or reasoning to it, nor any

justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is at the bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, and no good. Nothing but blind, pitiless indifference. DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is. And we dance to its music." *River Out of Eden - A Darwinian View of Life*, Richard Dawkins, 1996.

That's not what Romans 8:20 says!

3. Your groaning is part of a greater symphony of groaning that existed long before you uttered your first cry – and all of it has a glorious expiration date that God controls and cannot be exceeded by one moment

Romans 8:21-22 "Because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now."

There is an expiration date to all this groaning that's already on God's calendar – and it will launch you and the entire universe into a freedom and fullness of restoration and redemption that is going to blow your mind!

4. You do not groan alone!

Romans 8:23, 26 "And not only they, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body... Likewise, the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

God, the Spirit, groans with you, and through you, making sense out of your garbled phrases, that are often broken up with sobbing, as He carries you to the throne of grace to be received by your great High Priest – Jesus Christ!

Because of the Spirit of God living IN you and the Word of God speaking TO you, the complimentary cords of WAITING and HOPING can be woven into your groaning so that you can persevere.