

Do you like to dream about the future?

As believers, we live with a tension. We are fully present in today, and yet we long for tomorrow. There are two dangers on either side of that tension.

The first is being so consumed with the present that we forget why we were placed on this earth, chasing the next car, the next house, the next short term goal.

The second is the opposite. We become so focused on the future that we miss the lessons and blessings God has for us today, forgetting that He has given us breath and purpose for right now.

In Romans 8:18, Paul shifts our focus from the present work of the Holy Spirit to the future glory God promises His children. This section is about suffering and glory: first creation's, then the Christian's.

Before we look at the verses individually, let's consider four truths about how suffering and glory relate.

They Belong Together

Remember verse 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."

Jesus suffered while He walked the earth, and when He was victorious over death and sin on the cross, He was glorified. Philippians 2:8-11 captures it well. He humbled Himself to death on a cross, and God highly exalted Him, giving Him the name above every name. There is no future glory without suffering.

Suffering and Glory Characterize Two Ages

There is a real difference between the age we live in now and the age to come. This present, broken world is full of suffering. Debbie and I were reading Isaiah 53 recently, the chapter describing the suffering servant, the prophecy of Jesus. Verse 3 says, "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

Why is Jesus called a man of sorrows? Because He is the Creator God, and He walked this earth as a man, experiencing the suffering sin has caused. The Hebrew word for grief can also mean sickness, and Jesus is still grieved by the pain in this world.

But the age to come is one of inexpressible glory: the splendor of God's presence, immortal bodies, what theologians call glorification. I could spend all day describing that future and still fail to capture it.

They Cannot Be Compared

Verse 18 says, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Suffering and glory are inseparable, but they are not equal. The glory of God far outweighs the deepest suffering we could ever face.

Suffering Touches Both Creation and God's Children

Not only are we suffering, but all of creation suffers with us. Verse 19 says creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. In Genesis 3, when God judged Adam and Eve, creation itself was subjected to the curse. Death entered a world where it never belonged. The Greek phrase for "eager longing" pictures someone with a raised head, craning their neck toward the horizon. That is creation, watching for the children of God to be revealed and glorified, because when that happens, creation will begin to be restored.

Creation was subjected to frustration when Adam sinned. Verses 20-21 tell us it was subjected to futility, not by its own choice, but in hope that it would one day be set free from its bondage to decay. Paul's word for futility means emptiness, meaninglessness, the same idea Solomon wrestled with in Ecclesiastes. But God subjected creation in hope, with a plan to redeem both mankind and creation for His glory. Verse 22 tells us creation will be liberated from its bondage to corruption. Jesus spoke of this in Matthew 19:28, calling it the renewal of all things. We can't picture exactly what that will look like, but it will be free of everything that decays.

Verse 22 also says creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth. That pain is not hopeless. A mother endures excruciating labor because new life is coming, and creation groans the same way, suffering now but anchored in hope. Jesus described this same pattern in Matthew 24, calling wars, famines, and earthquakes the beginning of birth pains.

The Suffering and Future Glory of God's Children

What about us, the ones longing for Christ's return? Three things mark our current and future state.

1: We Have the Firstfruits of the Spirit

When the firstfruits were harvested, they were a promise that a full harvest was coming. Paul may have had the Feast of Weeks in mind, the celebration fifty days after Passover we know as Pentecost, when the Spirit came upon the church as the first installment of God's promised glory.

2: We Groan Inwardly

Even with the Spirit living in us, we groan. His presence makes us more aware that things are not right, in the world and within ourselves. Our bodies break down. Our inner being is still prone to sin, and when we fall, we feel the pain of stepping outside God's grace, the pain that draws us back to repentance.

3: We Wait for Our Adoption, the Redemption of Our Bodies

We already have the assurance of salvation, but a deeper promise remains. One day we will be changed into the image of the risen Christ, free from pain and decay.

Verses 24-25 land on one word: hope. Our culture has cheapened that word into wishful thinking. “I hope the Chiefs win tonight.” Or “I hope for a few more warm days.” But Biblical hope means anticipating a certain outcome with confidence. It is trusting in what Christ has already accomplished on the cross and waiting patiently for His return.

John Stott put it well: *“We are to wait neither so eagerly that we lose our patience, nor so patiently that we lose our expectation, but eagerly and patiently together.”*

Are you longing for Christ's return, or has this world grown too comfortable for you? There is real blessing in trusting the Lord through the waiting, and in joining Him in what He is doing today. We know He is coming again, and those who trust Him will receive restored, eternal, glorified bodies.

Are you living for eternity, or is the world still more enticing?