

# WE ARE MORE THAN CONQUERS

## Introduction:

There are four ways that most people use when they're facing suffering and difficulty.

### A. Denial.

This is where most of us begin in dealing with suffering. It's the John Wayne mentality. Grit your teeth, smile even when you're hurting, never let them see you sweat. When someone is in denial, they won't admit the truth even when they know you know the truth. You'll say, "How are you doing?" They'll say, "Great! I'm doing great!" You know they're not telling the truth. We're all like that occasionally. There's something in all of us that makes us pretend that everything is going OK even when it's not. We pretend the problem is not there or we pretend that it's not as bad as it really is.

### B. Getting angry.

Sometimes we react to difficulty by getting bitter, by getting recriminatory, and sometimes by shaking our fists at God. When you don't deal with your anger constructively, it affects every relationship in life—including your relationship with God. It is impossible to go through life angry at others and maintain a warm and positive relationship with God. You can't hate your neighbor and love God at the same time. Some believers live that way for years—and then they wonder why God seems so distant and their prayers so empty and their Christian experience so lifeless. If that describes you, please take a good look inside, because you will never get better until you deal with the anger within.

### C. Blaming others.

This is a very popular option. We all use it sooner or later. It is always easier to place the blame on others in order to some how vindicate ourselves from the situation. The "blame game" is the way society deals with it's failures and short comings. For us "christians" its not the blame game, but rather allowing God to help us to be humbled and teachable in times of failure or trials.

D. Accept it and learn from it.

Our final option regarding suffering is to accept it and to learn from it. You can deny it, you can get angry, you can blame someone else, or you can accept what happens to you and begin to learn from it. Of those four ways, only the last one is a truly Christian way of dealing with the difficulties of life. When trouble comes, you really only have two choices. Either you can become a victim or you can become a student. How much better it is to be a student than a victim. Being a student means asking yourself, "What have I learned from this? What is God trying to say to me? How can I grow from this painful experience?"

Having said that, I have to admit that there are many questions I can't answer about why bad things happen to God's people. Sometimes the reasons are obvious; more often they are obscure. If I had all the time in the world, I still couldn't answer all the questions about suffering because some of them simply defy any human explanation. However, what I do want to do is call your attention to one of the central passages in the New Testament on the issue of the believer and his suffering. The New Testament contains a number of helpful passages on this subject, but this one is one of the most important. We find in our text a liberating perspective. It will lift you up if you are in the throes of despair. All of us need to learn what God is saying in this passage of Scripture—[Romans 8:18-27](#).

## **I. Our Suffering is Temporary. 19-22**

We live in a frustrating world, don't we? Nothing works the way it is supposed to. You buy something, it breaks, you fix it, it works for awhile, and then breaks again. Eventually it wears out completely and you have to replace it. That's what Paul means when he says the creation was subjected to frustration. Nothing lasts forever, nothing works right. We live in a Murphy's Law universe.

But it's not just creation, it's also you and me. We don't work right either. Children are born with horrible defects, we get cancer or Alzheimer's or AIDS or some other wasting disease. If you live long enough, you'll have a stroke or a heart attack or grow senile and end up in a nursing home.

That's ahead for all of us, and there is no escape for any of us. Unless you happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time and get shot at a freeway rest stop in Florida—or on the streets of Chicago.

Verse 21 speaks of the “bondage to decay.” Every Thursday morning two trucks come by my house. One picks up the lawn cuttings and glass and plastic for recycling; the other picks up our garbage. The trucks come every Thursday. Why? Because the flow of garbage never ceases. The more we make, the more we spend. The more we spend, the more we use. The more we use, the more we waste. The more we waste, the more garbage we produce. If you doubt that, just let the garbage truck drivers go on strike for a week or two. Just see how fast the mountains of garbage pile up all around you. We live in a decaying, frustrating world.

Open the newspaper and you read about the Mississippi River flooding. You read about storms, tornadoes, famines and earthquakes. You read about debt crisis. You read about an 11 year old girl that was taken out of her home in the middle of the night. Something has gone wrong with the world. This is not the world as God meant it to be. This is a world full of pain, suffering and death. This is the world as it has been messed up and knocked out of kilter by the entrance of sin.

The Christian viewpoint on suffering is to say, “Yes, it's bad. But it's not going to last forever. Yes, it's terrible, but this isn't the final story. This isn't the last chapter. Yes, we suffer, but God has ordained that our suffering is temporary. Something better for us is on the way.” That's the first axiom. Our suffering is temporary.

## **II. Our Suffering is Educational 23-25**

We groan inwardly, Paul says. We groan because of a job we hate. A few days ago a brother in the Lord told me that after several years of being in the ministry he had had enough and he was quitting. “I can't take it anymore.” We groan because of unfulfilled dreams. We groan because our bodies break down. We groan because our marriages break up. We groan because our children go astray. We groan because our friends disappoint us.

Why does God allow such groaning among his children? Why doesn't he do something about it? Doesn't he know what we're going through? Doesn't he care?

Sometimes we begin to question God—as if he somehow enjoys seeing his children suffer. We imagine him laughing in heaven as we weep. But it is not so. He knows what we are going through. He cares about our suffering. He feels our pain.

The Bible says God allows our pain for a purpose. Verses 24-25 tell us that through our suffering God wants to develop two qualities in us:

Hope

Patience

Hope is that settled confidence that looks to the future, knowing that God will someday keep all his promises. Patience is the ability to endure present hardship because you have hope in the future.

Our suffering is educational in that it teaches us hope and patience—two qualities that can't be gained any other way. You only hope for that which you do not have. If you have it, you don't have to hope for it. But if you don't have it, then hope teaches you to wait patiently for it.

What is it that we are waiting for? Paul calls it “our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” We're waiting for the day when our bodies will be redeemed, when we can turn in the old model and get a brand new one from the Lord. In that day we will be adopted as sons—that is, we will enter into our full legal standing as the children of God. Right now—in this age—we are children of God living in decaying bodies. You can't tell by the outside who we are on the inside. We look like everyone else. We get sick, our bodies decay, we eventually die. But because we are related to Jesus Christ, we will someday be given a body like his—incorruptible, immortal, undying. We don't have it yet, but we're eagerly waiting for that day to come.

There is coming a day when your body won't need changing. You won't grow old and you won't get cancer. Jesus Christ will give you a brand new body. Until then we live in hope, waiting patiently for that day to come.

That perspective explains so much that happens to us. God is weaning you away from putting your hope in the things of this world so that your hope will be in him alone. The only way he can wean you away from the things of this world is through suffering and difficulty. He brings you to the place where you must say, "Lord, it's you and you alone." He's teaching you to wait on God. Right now you're trying to scheme your way into a better situation. But eventually you'll say, "Lord, if it takes forever, go ahead. Take your time. My hope is in you."

### **III. Our Suffering is Beneficial      26-27**

It sounds strange to say that our suffering can somehow be beneficial to us. Some would say it even sounds un-Christian. How can cancer be beneficial? How can the loss of a job be beneficial? How can a broken marriage be beneficial? How can public humiliation be beneficial? How can tears at midnight be beneficial?

Our text explains it this way. Our suffering reveals our weakness. It strips away the mask of self-sufficiency and reveals our utter helplessness. It forces us to confront our own inabilities. It makes us say, "I'm not as strong as I thought I was. I'm not invincible." Verse 26 says the Spirit "helps" us in our weakness. The word translated "help" means "to come to the aid of someone in desperate need." You are in the stands watching a race and you see a runner faltering in the final turn. He stumbles and is about to fall. Seeing that he is not going to make it, you rush from the stands, come to his side, put your arm around him, and say, "Brother, I see that you aren't going to make it. Let me help you to the finish line." That's what the Holy Spirit does for us. He sees when we are in trouble and he comes to our aid.

How does he do it? Paul tells us that the Spirit "intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." The Holy Spirit prays for us.

The Spirit who is himself the third member of the Trinity prays to the Father (the first member of the Trinity) in the name of the Son (the second member of the Trinity) for us in our moment of weakness. It is God praying to God on behalf of God's children! What an amazing thought this is.

“Oh God!”

Paul is telling us that in your weakness, when you feel desperate about the things that truly matter to you, and you don't know what to say, and all you can do is cry out “Oh God!” the message is, “Don't worry. That's enough because there is someone inside you who is praying for you.”

We know that Jesus is in heaven praying for us. But Paul goes a step beyond that. When you come to the moment of complete exhaustion and can no longer frame the words, you don't have to worry. The Holy Spirit will pray for you. In your weakness he is strong. When you cannot speak, he speaks for you.

When we lean against the wall of desperation, crying out to God, when we whisper, “God, I don't know what to say. I don't know how to pray about this,” the Holy Spirit comes alongside and says, “Don't worry. I'll pray for you.” And he does.

#### Martin Luther's Comment

Writing some 450 years ago, he said, “It's a good thing if we occasionally receive the opposite of what we pray for because that's a sign the Holy Spirit is at work in your life.” We may be praying, “Lord, do this and this and this.” Meanwhile the Holy Spirit inside is saying, “Lord, what he means is this. Don't pay any attention to that. He said thus-and-so. If he saw the bigger picture, he'd really ask for such-and-such.” As we pray from our weak and limited perspective, the Holy Spirit “corrects” our prayers, so to speak, so that God's will is always done even in our most wrong-headed prayers. Since the Holy Spirit knows what God's will is, and since he searches our hearts (see verse 27), he is able to pray for us in ways that always correspond with God's will. One sign that this is actually happening is that we pray for one thing and God does the opposite.

Does that mean our prayers are in vain? Not at all. Does it mean we shouldn't pray? Not at all. It simply reveals our inherent human weakness and the limitation of our perspective on life. We see the part, the Holy Spirit sees the whole. We see one little piece, the Holy Spirit sees the big picture. We pray according to the little bit that we see, the Holy Spirit prays according to his perfect knowledge.