

How do we cope with suffering?

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[0 : 00] Well today I'd like us to turn back to Romans chapter 8 and we are going to look together again at verse 18.

David Paul 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.

As we've been saying over the recent weeks, Romans chapter 8 is one of the most wonderful chapters in the Bible that we can ever go to and sometimes we can find that we think to ourselves, where do I go in the Bible if I want to find encouragement?

Where do I go in the Bible if I want to find strength from God's Word? Where do I go if I want to hear something that's going to help me in my Christian life? There's many many places that you can go but one of the ones that you always want to have in your back pocket is Romans chapter 8.

It is full of wonderful teaching. It's just a glorious summary of the blessings that are ours if we put our faith in Jesus Christ.

[1 : 22] Throughout this chapter Paul's been working his way through various aspects of the blessings that are ours if we know Jesus. And last week we were looking at the fact that if we are trusting in Jesus Christ we enjoy the extraordinary privilege of being adopted as the children of God.

That's what Paul speaks about in verses 12 to 17, the fact that if we trust in Jesus, we are not slaves, we are sons.

We are adopted as the precious beloved children of God. And as children of God we are heirs of all that God promises to us.

A great reminder that God wants to give us his best. He wants to bless us with an abundance of wonderful things. So in many ways Romans 8 is very positive.

It's talking about all the great things that are ours if we trust in Jesus. But at the same time when Paul just reaches the heights of talking about adoption which really is the heights of theological blessing, he also reminds us of the fact that we also will suffer as Christians.

[2 : 44] You can see he says that, if children and heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ provided we suffer with him in order that we may be glorified with him.

So Paul's giving us a great reminder that suffering is a reality. Suffering is something that we are going to face. The Christian message is not one of blind optimism that basically says, oh everything's going to be great, it's going to be easy.

The Christian message is very real and very aware of the fact that in this life, yes we have many privileges but we are also going to suffer.

And so with the reality of suffering in life, we have to ask the question, how do we cope? How do we cope when we face suffering?

And that's a really important question and it's a question that the world is trying to answer all the time. Nobody likes suffering, people don't want to suffer and people are looking for a solution to that problem.

[3 : 53] How do we cope? How do we deal with it? And we can observe the world around us and we can see the fact that people are trying many, many different things in order to cope with suffering and yet all of these are often very, very unhealthy.

So for example, people will try to do something that will make them feel better. So you have a really, really bad week at work and you go out at the weekend and you drink and drink and drink until you forget about it all.

Makes you feel better. You think, I've forgotten about all these stresses and strains that I have, I don't need it. People go to an even further extreme and they'll maybe take drugs or something like that in order to try and numb their mind or distract their mind from the sufferings that they're going through.

But it doesn't even need to be as extreme as that. Sometimes to feel better, we might try and just buy something for ourselves. How many times have you done that?

You think, oh, I'm in a bad week. If I buy this thing, it'll make me feel better. I've done that often enough. You think getting something will make you feel better. Sometimes if somebody hurts us, the way that we can feel better is to actually take a heart and a frustration out on somebody else.

[5 : 18] So we might gossip about somebody. We might criticise somebody. We might snap at somebody because we cope with our suffering, without insecurities and their difficulties by laying into somebody else.

Easy done. And maybe you experienced that for yourself in the past week. We suffer. People look for solutions, but very often the world will go down a road that is unhealthy and unhelpful in terms of coping with suffering.

The question we have to ask is, what does the Christian do? How does the Christian cope with suffering? And that's the question that's been answered, I think, in verse 18.

Because Paul is telling us something very important and something very simple. He says, the way for you to cope with suffering is to think.

And in particular, it's to think about your future as a Christian. Now when I say all this, it applies to everybody.

[6 : 36] It applies to those who will be professing in faith. It applies to those who are maybe not sure where they stand before the Lord. And applies to you even if you're very clear that you're not a Christian. This is what you have as a Christian, or this is what you will have if you put your faith in Jesus Christ and Paul is saying, the way for us to cope with suffering is to think about this.

And he highlights that fact by using two important phrases in Romans chapter, in verse 18 of this verse.

The first one is there. I consider that the suffering is in this present time and so on. Now that's a really, really, really important word and it's a really interesting word.

It's a word that's related to a very particular profession, a particular job that people have and it's a job that I think is possibly the most boring job in the world.

Accounting. And I am sorry for all the accountants in here. Accounting is not my strong point and it's not something that I take a huge interest in, it's not something that I particularly understand very well.

[7 : 45] But this word here that Paul uses is a word that actually is very much related to accounting. Because it conveys the idea of setting out your account, of basically laying down in an orderly logical sequence your thoughts.

And it's a bit like you're just setting out the step by step figure of whatever it is you're thinking about. It's a very, very logical word, very orderly word and it conveys the idea of setting out an account.

So it's coming from the world of accounting. Second key phrase is just the next line, worth comparing. So Paul says, I consider that the suffering in this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Now here Paul is just hinting us towards the idea of a comparison. So if you're thinking in terms of accounting, you imagine you've got one column on one side and you've got another column on the other side and you can compare the two.

We do that all the time. So a couple of weeks ago we had our AGM, you've got a column which says income and another column that says expenditure. You've got one column that says 2016, another column that says 2017.

[8 : 58] So you look at the two things set out and you see if there's a comparison between the two. Paul is telling us he wants us to think like an accountant in terms of our suffering.

So that might seem a wee bit strange. You had a bad week and you come to me and you say, what does God have from his word that would help me after a bad week?

And I'm saying, think like an accountant. It seems a bit strange. So what's Paul doing? Well I think he's basically telling us to set out a column of our present sufferings and then to see how that looks in light of what God has for our future.

That's exactly what we're going to do. We're going to set out an account. And so we're going to start by thinking about our present sufferings and there are many things that we could say here and in no particular order I've selected 10.

10 aspects of our present sufferings that are a reality in life and are very often a reality to yourself. So number one, we see disasters in the world.

[10 : 15] You only have to look at the news to see that whether it's natural disasters happening just because of the events of the world, whether it's accidental disasters, maybe something falls down, something breaks unexpectedly, or whether it's deliberate, a war or something like that.

You see massive scale disasters in the world and you see huge suffering as a result of these things. And sometimes we're so used to it we become numb to it.

And often because these things tend to happen in other countries we tend to forget the horror of it all. But of course later in this year, in fact the beginning of next year, we'll be remembering the centenary of the Islayer disaster when 200 men on the verge of getting home from the war were killed when the boat they were on sunk as at a boat storm away harbour.

You see horrendous suffering as a result of disasters like that. Number two, physical pain and illness. It's probably a reality to a lot of people in here either right now or at some point in your lives, we get ill, we get sore and we can find that causes a huge amount of suffering.

Can happen for lots of reasons. It's a reality that many, many people face. And I'm sure many of you face it or many of your loved ones as well.

[11 : 49] Number three, sadness. A great reminder that often it's not a physical pain that hurts us the most, it can be our emotional pain, can't it?

When I think, if you were to ask me the question, when in your life have you suffered the most? The events that I would be thinking of were not physical injuries or physical illnesses.

The events that I would think of are times when in my mind I was full of sorrow. And so emotional pain is a reality and it can be immensely hard to deal with.

Number four, worry. So often we can be made sad because of events that have happened, but we can also find ourselves suffering because of things that haven't yet happened.

And so we worry about what might happen. We worry about what might happen to our children. We worry what might happen to our elderly parents. We worry what might happen to ourselves.

[12 : 59] I'm pretty sure everybody in here worries and it causes a huge amount of suffering. And I think related to that is the fact that every person here who is working, I am sure at some point, faces stress in their lives.

You look at Scotland in 2018 and you think of suffering. You think, well, we don't suffer because we don't have clean water. We don't suffer because we don't have adequate food supplies. We don't suffer even because we're at war, because we're not.

But people do suffer more than ever, I would say, through the pressure that they are under at work. And you might be thinking of tomorrow morning about what's waiting for you at work, or you might have had a week where one phone call or one email has just placed you under huge strain.

So we worry. It's a reality in life. Number five, rejection. That can be immensely painful.

Maybe friends at school rejected you for whatever reason. Maybe colleagues at work keep their distance for some reason.

[14 : 11] Maybe there's a boy or a girl you like and they're not interested in you in that way. Whatever it may be, there are few pains as soared, as the pain of rejection when other people don't want to know.

It's a hugely, hugely painful thing. Number six, loneliness. So sometimes the fear of rejection makes people think, well, I'm just going to keep my distance from everybody.

I'm not going to put myself out there. Not going to make the effort. I'm not going to take that risk where I might be rejected. I'm just going to keep myself to myself. People do that.

And sometimes for other reasons, people are left isolated, whether it's old age or ill health or maybe their own shyness. And people can really, really suffer because they're lonely and they're isolated.

We face this. That's number six. Number seven, futility. Now, by that I mean the idea of having a lack of purpose. So sometimes our struggles and our suffering can be a result of what we're doing.

[15 : 26] Other times our suffering can be a result of what we're not doing. So we look at our lives and we think, I haven't achieved what I wanted to achieve. I haven't done what I thought I would do.

I haven't achieved what I had hoped. My dreams have not come true. Sometimes we feel like we lack purpose. Sometimes we feel that we can't offer very much.

So you think, well, you know, I can, you thought, you think to yourself, well, you know, I could never get that job or I could never become involved in that thing because I've just, there's no way I would be up to the job. There's no way I could do it.

We lack ability, we lack strength. We just feel like we're a bit of a waste of space sometimes. And so we can lack that sense of purpose and it can cause a huge amount of suffering, a huge amount of depression.

Number eight is paranoia. I won't get you to put your hands up, but who here gets paranoid sometimes? You don't need to put your hands up, but we all do. We all do.

[16 : 23] We all think that other people think badly of us for whatever reason. We can often feel that circumstances are against us and we can often default to thinking the worst in any situation.

And it can happen to us all the time in so many different ways. And even for myself last week, I was at the General Assembly and you would maybe be astounded to hear this, that I spoke a lot because I always talk too much.

And so when there was discussions, I thought, well, I would like to say something, so I would say something and I tend to do that. I always tend to do that. I'm not one of these people who goes to a meeting and just sits quietly. People probably wish I was, but you do that and then you come with thinking, oh, maybe I spoke too much.

Maybe I said too much. Maybe I should have just kept quiet. And I was thinking that the other night when I was tired back at the hotel room. We all do it in different ways.

We all get paranoid. We all have this sense of what are other people thinking. So often we worry about what other people think.

[17 : 41] Number nine, poverty, as I said, there's no particular order in many ways. That should be much further up. But we mentioned that with Tear Fund. Poverty is a massive problem in the world, massive problem in Scotland.

People lacking what they need. People exploited and people with power, using that power to make sure that they preserve their position. And then finally, I suppose this sums it all up, often our suffering is a result of heart break.

For whatever reason, heartbreak at the loss of loved ones, heartbreak at the breakdown of relationships, heartbreak at the fact that life has not gone the way we have gone.

As I said, it's just 10 things. You could probably add another 100 or 1000 if you wanted. I haven't based these on any particular order. It's just 10 things that came to mind.

So is your life on that list somewhere? You think back in the last week, have you had any of those things in your life? Of course you have.

[18 : 48] We all face them, probably many of them. And even the ones that we maybe haven't faced, we probably will. So in terms of accounting, if we're accountants and we're looking at that, that's a pretty long list and it's a lot of suffering.

These are a reality and an experience and they're very, very difficult to deal with. So suffering is real, suffering is hard. And the question we've got to ask is how do we cope?

And Paul is saying the way to cope is to compare that list with what God has got planned for your future if you trust in Jesus.

So this is where we get to the heart of what being a Christian is about, what God plans for you. Always remember that, that what God's priority is not just what difference it will make for you now, but what difference it will make for your future.

What is always thinking about the future when he is calling you to faith in Jesus Christ. Not just for a better life today, it's for your future. In fact, really the whole goal lies in the future.

[20 : 05] Paul says, compare that with the future. So let's do it. Let's test Paul and see if he's right. We'll set the two accounts side by side.

So in our current situation, our present sufferings, we face natural and manmade disaster. In our future, God is promising us a new creation.

God is promising us a new creation. That's the great goal of the Bible. Not just renewed individuals, not just a people of God, but a whole restored creation.

A new universe where all the effects of the curse, all the brokenness and damage will be gone. So God's plan is not to take us up to heaven and plonk us on clouds with harps.

God's plan is to restore creation. God can do that. God created the universe in the first place, so God can recreate it. And that's exactly what he's going to do. And that new creation will have no curse.

[21 : 09] There will be no disasters, no epidemics, no shortages, no calamities, no hostilities. God is going to renew the universe and restore the world where there will be none of the damage that the curse of sin has brought.

In our present sufferings, we face physical pain and illness. In our future, we will have resurrection bodies. So for all who trust in Jesus, when we are brought into that new creation, we will have resurrection bodies.

Now by that we mean simply the fact that just as Jesus rose from the dead and is now at God the Father's side with a resurrected body, so too will we.

Our bodies will be resurrected. Our bodies will be like His. And as Paul describes beautifully in another letter to the Corinthians, he says, this mortal, perishable, fragile body is going to put on immortality and imperishability.

So if you're sore right now, if you're sitting here today and you're sore, look at that part of your body, whether it's your hands or think about your back, if it's your back or whatever it is, you can look forward to being able in the new creation to look at your resurrected body and say, it's better.

[22 : 35] It's fixed. And it will never hurt again. In our present sufferings, we face sadness.

In our future, God has promised us abundant joy. There's a brilliant version, Psalm 16 that talks about this. It should be on the next slide, I hope.

Here it says, you've made known to me the path of life. In your presence, there is fullness of joy. At your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

That word fullness is a great word because it conveys the idea of satisfaction. It's like the idea of having your tummy full. The idea of just being full and satisfied with no lack.

And what God is promising us in our future is a joy that is so complete that you do not have room for anymore and you do not have need for anymore.

[23 : 31] That's what God wants you to have, a joy that fills you. A joy that fills up every part of your being that has been broken and hurt and left empty because of the sufferings of this life.

God promises you joy, abundant joy. In our present sufferings, we have worry. But in our future, God promises us peace.

Jesus said that even now we can have peace. He says, peace I leave with you, peace I give to you. But in our future, we will know the perfect, complete peace of God that passes all understanding.

Right now, it's impossible not to worry and it's impossible to avoid stress. But when God takes us home, when God takes you home, if you are trusting in Him, it will be impossible for anything to take away your peace.

In our present sufferings, we face rejection. In our future, we will be part of God's family. Now, sometimes we wonder what heaven is going to be like, don't we?

[24 : 42] We think, well, what would heaven be like? And sometimes we can almost, I think, be a wee bit nervous of heaven because we think, I don't know what heaven's going to be like.

And many of us, self included, are always nervous of things that are different or things that we don't know. And we can think, well, what if I don't fit in?

And sometimes people can feel like that. I've felt like that at times in my life. But we must never forget that whilst, yes, I can't tell you exactly what heaven is going to be like, one thing I can tell you is that if you are united to Jesus, when you get to heaven, you will know without any doubt that you belong there.

Because when you come there, you're coming into the family where you truly belong. God's children belong with him in his house.

And that's why there will be no rejection. No rejection at all. No cliques in heaven.

[25 : 58] No elite. Just a beautiful family and a perfect welcome from Jesus. In our present suffering, we experience loneliness.

In our future, God is going to bring us all together. That's one of the many, many wonderful things about heaven. It's a place where we will be together.

It helps people together. I think that's one of the reasons why the Bible describes the new creation as a city. You go all the way to the very end of the Bible, you'll see in Revelation, describes this new creation as a city.

I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. Now, a city is a place of community. It's a place where people are together.

It's a place where people are safe. So when you read that word city, we who live in the country can sometimes think, oh, we like the country more than the city. We shouldn't, and we think, we don't want a concrete jungle for eternity.

[26 : 59] That's not what it's referring to at all. It's just referring to the togetherness of it, the community aspect, the safe aspect, the fact that we will be with one another. In other words, no one will ever, ever be lonely in the new creation.

Never be lonely, ever. In our present sufferings, we lack fulfillment. Things can seem futile, but in our future, God promises us perfect fulfillment.

So in the new creation, a day will never be boring. It will never be long. It will never be pointless. A person will never be surplus to requirements.

Every one of us will bear the image of God in the way that Jesus himself does. Paul talks about that in his chapter. He says that we're predestined to be conformed to the image of his son. That means being everything that God wants us to be, able to worship him and serve him and enjoy him forever.

So every single day in the new creation will be a brilliant day, a day of excitement, of adventure, of satisfaction, of laughter, of achievement, of fun.

[28 : 12] Every single moment will be brilliant. God promises us that fulfillment where we are everything that he wants us to be.

In our present sufferings, we can be paranoid, but in our future, we will have perfect fellowship with God and with each other.

What's the two most important commandments in the Bible? To love God and to love one another. We must never forget that these commandments will never, ever be broken in the new creation.

So if you think of that in terms of our relationship to one another, no one will ever be bad to you in the new creation.

Our friendships will be strong and deep and secure and gentle, characterised by kindness and consideration and the deepest of love one for another.

[29 : 13] And so none of the awful stuff that you will probably face this week, so you'll probably go to work this week and you'll see gossip and jealousy and cruelty and rivalry and backbiting.

There will be none of that ever in the new creation. In the new creation, you will be able to make friends knowing that through God's transforming restoration of the world and of us, people will never let you down.

And even if you have been hurt, even hurt by a Christian, even those wounds will be healed.

In our present sufferings, there's poverty in our future, God promises us perfect provision. So in the new creation, there will be no inequality, no exploitation, no greed and no lack.

Isaiah prophesies about this beautifully in these great words of invitation. Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters and use no money, come buy and eat, come buy wine and milk without money and without price.

[30 : 28] God promises us abundant provision and we will live in a world where righteousness dwells, where justice is always maintained, where everything is always fair, where everyone's needs are fully met.

And then finally, in our present suffering, there is heartbreak in our future, there is perfect love. As Psalm 103 says, the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him.

God's new creation is a glorious place where the broken hearted will be healed.

So there's your two columns, you accountants in here or you amateur accountants as I want you to be today. What do you think of the two accounts? What do you think of the two columns?

Paul's conclusion and Paul's great point is that the sum total of all of our sufferings are utterly and totally outweighed by the astounding abundance and glory of all that God has prepared for us.

[31 : 53] In fact, what God has for us is so much greater. He says it's not even worth comparing.

It's not even worth comparing. Now that's not to minimize suffering because suffering is big and Paul knows that, but it's telling us how massive, how absolutely massive the blessings are which God has prepared for you.

So please, in your present sufferings, never forget that our suffering is nothing compared to the wonderful blessings that God has planned for all who trust in Him.

So how do we cope with sufferings in this life? What do we need to do? Paul is saying the way to cope is to think.

Think when you're sore, when you're sorrowful, when you're hurt. Think about how that compares to what God has planned for you.

[33 : 16] And I guarantee you it will give you the strength you need to cope. Think of your future. Think of the new creation. Think of all that God has for you.

Because for the Christian, present sufferings are worth it when compared to the future that God has for us.

So Christians need to think, but if you're not a Christian yet, you need to think as well.

You need to look at the column on the right and look at all that God wants to give you. And you need to ask yourself the question, what on earth would make it worthwhile to turn down all that?

And if you can give me a good answer to that, then great. But I can't see it. If you do not want to follow Jesus, you really need to ask yourself the question, is it worth it?

[34 : 30] Let's pray. Dear God, our Father, we thank you so, so much for all that Your Word teaches us.

We pray that You would give us clear thinking, that Your Word would shape our thoughts and shape our understanding and shape our perspective on life.

We pray for everyone here who is suffering and to those who are facing particular reasons to suffer at the moment, we pray for them. We pray that they would find comfort and strength in You.

And we pray that Your Word would just remind them of the glories that are to be revealed to us and all the wonderful promises that are ours in Jesus.

Help us to have that perspective. So often we're just filled with the thoughts of what's going on right now in our lives. Please forgive us for that.

[35 : 30] Help us to never forget the future that You have for us. And we pray, O God, that for every one of us that we would just make sure that we have a place in that future through trusting in You.

Thank You, O God. Thank You that You have so much wonderful blessings for us.