

*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

*Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. Romans 8:18-30*

As we gather together this morning, we do so in the shadow of a sudden, tragic death that has invaded the lives of the Wiebe family and the lives of the family of God here at Arrowsmith. We had two such sudden tragic deaths last year and another one the previous year, as well as other funerals in-between. When sudden tragic death invades our lives we are faced with the reality that while life on earth is precious it is also fragile, painful and brief. *It's been said that only when a life is faced with death does it become meaningful.* There are a number of ways to interpret that, depending on our view of God and our view of the world and our view of ourselves. The truth is, for the most part, most – or actually pretty much all of us - do interpret life and death in view of ourselves - *because we are the ones who are personally living out our lives, every moment of every day we are alive.* But when sudden tragic death invades our lives we are faced with how fragile and how painful and how brief our lives really are.

We are also experiencing that truth as the past few months a number of us have lost loved ones within our families - and we are also experiencing an extension of that truth in that a number of us have been and are still dealing with some serious illnesses and physical afflictions. We can also see the reality of the fragility and pain and the brevity of life in the sudden tragic deaths and aggressive violence and divisive attitudes that we are seeing in our community and in our country and in our world today. In Job 5:7 God's Word tells us that, *“man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.”* Job 14:1 tell us that life is but *“few of days and full of trouble.”* So much of what we see and hear about our world today is reflective of the *“trouble”* of struggle, affliction, loss, conflict, violence, tragedy, pain, suffering and death - and often what we personally experience is the same. Every one of us here this morning are in some way familiar with pain, suffering and death, in our own lives or in the lives of our loved ones. And without a doubt some of us – maybe, most of us – are struggling with some kind of pain, suffering and death right now. That struggle may be spiritual, relational, emotional, moral, financial or physical. Quite often, when we are experiencing pain, suffering and death we ask the questions: *“Why is this happening? Where did this come from? What is the purpose of all of this pain, suffering and death?”* These are the very same questions people throughout the world ask when it comes to not only personal pain, suffering and death – but also when they are trying to find answers about terrorist attacks and natural disasters. The truth is, even though we may try to deny it, when pain, suffering and death does come, we want those same answers too. We may phrase them differently, but we do want those answers. And on top of that, we also want the answers to the questions: *Why is God allowing this? Why is God doing this?”* – *because we want to know how a loving, all-powerful God can send or allow the kind of pain, suffering and death that we are experiencing into the world, particularly into the lives of those who truly love God and have surrendered our hearts and lives to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.*

God allows and sends pain, suffering and death into the world and into our lives because *Christians are called to live out their lives in the midst of pain, suffering and death*. Pain, suffering and death are our story. Followers of Jesus Christ are called to walk the well-worn path of pain, suffering and death. The history of Christianity reveals a pattern of pain, suffering and death that spans throughout redemptive history beginning with the prophets, Jesus, the apostles, the first church in Jerusalem and all the churches that followed. After the fall of Adam in the garden of Eden, God gives the first promise of salvation, mingled with a promise of pain, suffering and death: *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel”* (Genesis 3:15). God’s people would suffer in the battle between the two seeds — the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent - and ultimate victory over the serpent would only come through pain, suffering and death. The *“enmity”* between the serpent and the seed of the woman is first actualized after Eve gives birth to two sons. Abel is killed by Cain (Genesis 4:8) - the first victim of our enemy’s hatred, murdered by the seed of the serpent to bring pain, suffering and death into the world.

We see that same pain, suffering death when Job suffers the loss of his health, wealth, and children when the devil himself attacks him because of his righteousness among men (Job 1:1–2:6). And Joseph suffers false accusations from Potiphar’s wife (Genesis 39:14–18) and imprisonment as an innocent man. Israel, God’s chosen people, is afflicted and enslaved for 430 years in Egypt (Exodus 12:40), a nation led by Pharaoh, who is explicitly identified with the serpent when God calls him *“the great dragon”* (Ezekiel 29:3; 32:2). David, God’s anointed one, is hunted for several years by Saul who was rejected by God (1 Samuel 17–29). Jeremiah the prophet is persecuted by his own people after Israel has turned away from God. King Zedekiah put Jeremiah in prison for his faithfulness to God (Jeremiah 37). Many other prophets like Zechariah (Matthew 23:35) suffered and were killed for their faith. The epitome of the pain, suffering and death we are called in seen when Jesus, the of the *“seed”* of Eve, painfully suffers because of the false accusations of the scribes and the Pharisees. Christ suffered rejection, mockery, and a shameful death on a cross. This is the pinnacle of pain, suffering and death for God’s people, as Christ is the most righteous of them all, being sinless and without blame. All of the suffering, pain and death for God in the Old Testament from Abel to Zechariah pointed to Jesus, and Jesus’s pain, suffering and death has become the pattern for his disciples. The apostle Peter wrote, *“To this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps”* (1 Peter 2:21). The apostles endured much pain, suffering and death for living their lives for Jesus. The churches the apostles planted lived out the same pattern (Acts 14:22; Romans 5:3; Galatians 2:4). All kinds of saints ever since have experienced pain, suffering and death for their faith.

In Romans the apostle Paul wrote that we can know victory over the power of pain, suffering and death, through the Holy Spirit, because in Christ we are children and heirs of God. But in Romans 8:17 Paul also addresses the reality of the truth that while we may be forgiven of our sins before God through the cross of Christ, we are not yet totally cleansed of all sin in our flesh while we are still living in this fallen world. And so even if we are truly following Jesus, and even if we truly do *“set our minds on the things of the Spirit”* - our walk down the path of life here on earth with Jesus will still be one of *“suffering”* like Jesus, with Jesus. We are, he writes *“heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”* Paul then writes: *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us”* (Romans 8:18).

In our human flesh we look at this statement and we respond by saying that present suffering would seem to contradict the promise of future glory; but Paul declares that suffering is not only fundamental to future glory but also unworthy of comparison to future glory. Regardless of much we may ever experience pain, suffering and death in this life, *it will in no way be as bad as the glory of God in Christ will be supremely and gloriously good*. The apostle’s words here are consistent with the biblical principle that says: *“first suffering, then glory”* or in other words *“suffering produces glory.”* It was true of Jesus and it’ll be true for us too - if we are truly following Jesus. We see this in the phrase that *“glory . . . is to be revealed to us”* is that which comes about because of the *“sufferings of this present time.”*

What this means is that God allows and sends pain, suffering and death into the world - and into our lives - to accomplish His sovereign plans and purposes. In 2 Corinthians 4:16-18: Paul reflects his personal conviction of the reality God does allow/sends pain, suffering and death into our lives to accomplish His sovereign plans and purposes, by saying: *“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”* In our text for this morning God’s word reveals the tragic, catastrophic effect our sin had and still has on the world and on us and on God Himself - as we seek to know the fullness of victory over sin that we are offered in the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. In the context of using the word *“sufferings”* the apostle Paul speaks of expressing those *“sufferings”* with Christ with the word *“groaning”* by those afflicted. The Greek word translated to be *“groaning”* literally means *“to moan and groan.”* Groaning is a deep, inward response to pain, suffering and death. It is an affliction of pain, suffering and death that is personal and intense, an agony deep down inside that it just cannot be put into words.

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Romans 8:18-22

Because of sin, creation groans. Because sin has caused untold pain, suffering and death – we groan. When God finished creating His Creation, it was a good. But then Adam and Eve sinned - and now creation groans. Now there is pain, suffering and death. Now there is pride, pain, bitterness and brokenness. We hear that groaning in the Syria, the US, Canada and Port Alberni. We hear that groaning in our government, our schools and our churches. We hear that groaning in terrorists, in our families, in our attitudes and in our bodies. But that groaning is not without a purpose. God’s Word tells us that God *subjected* the creation to the *futility and bondage of pain, suffering and death*. He disordered the natural world because of the disorder of the moral and spiritual world - because of sin. In our present condition we are still blinded by sin and we still dishonor God every day, which we cannot see or feel. Hardly anyone in the world feels the horror that our sin is against God.

But Oh, how we feel our physical pain, suffering and death! John Piper has said that: *“Physical pain is God’s trumpet blast to tell us that something is dreadfully wrong in the world.”* Diseases and deformities are God’s pictures in the *physical* realm of what sin is like in the *spiritual* realm. Calamities are God’s previews of what sin deserves and will one day receive in judgment a thousand times worse. The disorders and deformities of the world are warnings to us. The good news is that there is *“hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”* Paul tells us this *“groaning”* in *“hope”* is like woman giving birth to a child. There is pain, but the pain will end when the child is delivered. *Someday* the pains creation presently suffers will be birth-pains that will bring a glorious delivery. *Someday* God will sovereignly restore creation, just as He sovereignly subjected creation to futility. *Someday* creation’s groaning will turn to into glorious singing. But in the meantime the creation is still in bondage to corruption. We are still going to have hurricanes, and floods and other natural disasters. It means that there are going to be evil people who will try to do harm to others. It means that there will be cancer and heart disease and car accidents.

*And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.* Romans 8:23-25

Because of sin, God's people groan. Because sin has caused untold pain, suffering and death – followers of Jesus groan. The condition of those who follow Christ in these verses is like that of creation. Like creation, we who were initially created in the image of God, now suffer and groan because we are sons and daughters of Adam and Eve's rebellion against God in the Garden. Our groaning is due to the remaining sin of the flesh in us, which causes pride and corruption and futility and division and arrogance within us and without us towards others. The divergence between what we are and what we shall someday be as "*children of God, heirs of Christ*" intensifies our groaning. But *someday* our bodies be redeemed and we will be totally free from the pain, suffering and death of sin, evil and the world – experiencing the full adoption as sons and daughters of God reigning with Christ over all creation. We do need to take note that in verse 23 Paul tells us that the groaning that born-again Christians experience in this world is interconnected to their indwelling possession of the Holy Spirit. This is probably not good news for those who believe the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit within us is nothing but joy, happiness, and delight. This groaning the apostle speaks of here is not the full manifestation of the fruits of the Spirit, but it is a part of the first fruits. Apart from God's Spirit, the groaning of which Paul speaks would be impossible for any of us. This groaning is due to sin and the consequences of sin – and as the Spirit within us bears witness that we are children of God, the Spirit also bears witness that the world in which live today is surely not the kingdom of God. The Spirit's presence and power produce groaning in us because the Spirit reveals to us not only what we are now, but also what we will someday be. The groaning of the Holy Spirit within us makes us painfully aware something is wrong with us and joyfully aware someday it will all be right.

*Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*

Romans 8:25-27

Because of sin, the Holy Spirit groans for us. God tells us God is always with us (Deuteronomy 31:6) and so God's omnipresence means He is with us even in the midst of our "*groanings.*" Jesus himself groaned; in John 11:33 we read: "*When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.*" Christ groaned with those who were weak with suffering. The same is true today; the Holy Spirit groans for us as the Spirit feels the burdens of our weaknesses because of the pain, suffering and death we experience. But the Spirit does more than groan. He also prays for us in His groaning so that we might be led into the will of God. We do not always know God's will because we are weak when we struggle. We do not always know how to pray, but the Spirit intercedes so we might live in the will of God in spite of our pain, suffering and death.

Now there are some who do hold to view of the Christian life that walking in the Spirit means that Christians should never groan, believing that being Spirit-filled is synonymous with constant happiness and continuous spiritual bliss. To them, the groanings of pain, suffering and death are for those who are unsaved or spiritually immature. But that's not biblical or reality. The reality is that we are fallen human beings who live in a fallen world. Verse 20 has already revealed to us that we are subject - because of our sinful rebellion and by God's sovereign decree - to corruption and futility. Those who seek to walk in the Spirit must come to grips with this matter of our corruption and our futility in life. In our weakness we cannot pray nor walk in the Spirit on our own. The Spirit does not remove all of our groanings of pain, suffering and death; rather He moves to communicate our groanings to God. Walking in the Spirit does not eliminate the fallenness of this world or the fallenness of our own flesh. Our fallenness will only be totally and completely eliminated when Jesus comes again and the sons of God are revealed. If Jesus groaned, we will too. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke of the blessing of those who do groan. In Matthew 5:3-5 he said: "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*"

In hearing Jesus' words here it seems that the question is not whether we should be groaning, but rather -What good does the groaning of pain, suffering and death produce in us? Does our groaning of pain, suffering and death give us a hunger for heaven? Does our groaning make us so discontented with our lives that we willing to look to the Holy Spirit to help us to surrender to God's will? The answer is -

*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* Romans 8:28

This verse is one of the most sweeping and most loved promises in all the Bible – and quite often the most misused and misunderstood. In context, a summary of this verse tells us that because of sin, the Holy Spirit groans for us and intercedes for us according to the will of God *for the good purpose of God*. There are some who interpret this verse to mean that God creates and then sends things like pain, suffering, and death into our lives for our good. Some people see these words as the sweetest words they've ever heard; for others, the same words make them sick to their stomach. Part of the problem is how this vision of God's goodness in bringing pain, suffering and death into our lives is often presented. Romans 8:28 is a *beautiful* promise, but it can also be a blunt sledgehammer to people who are hurting.

In order to truly understand what Romans 8:28 means, we need to remember that in all pain, in all suffering, in all death there are always two sources or agents at work, but only one is ultimately ruling. One source is the reality of the depravity of brokenness and sin. Because of the worldwide rebellion against God, Satan rules over the current age of evil in the world. The other and ultimate source of every pain, suffering and death is God, who in Isaiah 45:5-7 declares: *"I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the Lord, who does all these things."*

In the book of Job we read that Satan asks God for permission to afflict Job to prove that Job will turn his back on God. Satan does not get the final call. God grants him permission, and establishes the rules and boundaries. Satan afflicts Job, sparing his life. Job's wife comes home and says, *"Curse God and die,"* (Job 2:9) because of all the suffering. Job responds, *"Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?"* (Job 2:10). God could have stopped that evil. Some might protest and rebuke Job for giving God credit for his pain rather than Satan. But in the immediate context in Job it says, *"In all this, Job did not sin with his lips"* (2:10). Amos 3:6: *"Does disaster come to a city, unless the Lord has done it?"*

The *"good"* God brings to pass in our lives is the result of the *"all things"* which God has brought into our lives – which includes pain, suffering and death. The *"good"* may therefore be viewed presently in terms of our attitude toward God - and in terms of the faith and perseverance which the groaning of pain, suffering and death are intended to promote and produce. Taken individually, the events and circumstances God allows may not, in and of themselves, appear to be of any value or good. But Paul does not say that each event and circumstance is good or even that each incident will produce that which is good. He tells us that all events and all circumstances work together producing what is good. We see this when we bake a cake. The ingredients that go into a cake are not very tasty when eaten individually. But mix all of these together in the right proportions, and then bake the combined mixture, and you have a great tasting cake. Each event in our life is like one ingredient in a cake. It may not seem good, by itself, but when mixed by God with other correct events, it will produce what is good. Paul speaks here of God's sovereignty in terms of His choosing and blending of all of our experiences, in such a way as to produce that which is good. God causes all things to *"work together"* for *"good."* This means we cannot judge the goodness of God's work until His agenda is finished. Until God's recipe for our lives is complete, we dare not judge God's baking. We'd best entrust ourselves to Him as the baker, knowing that He always blends the right ingredients, at the right time, in the right way, in the right proportions, according to His glorious purpose – even in the midst of pain, suffering and death.

Consider the incredible power of God required by the truth of His sovereignty. Since all things “*work together*” - then the more things included in the category of “*all things*,” the greater God’s power and control must be. God controls all of the events in the life of everyone - every believer and every non-believer, which is a task that is beyond human comprehension. It is a task only a loving and sovereign God with infinite wisdom and power can accomplish. If we are to take Paul’s words in Romans 8:28 literally and seriously, we must face the fact that “*all things*” includes those things which we find painfully unpleasant. We may even think they are unbearable or ungodly. But “*all things*” includes the sin of others and even our own sins. “*All things*” means there is nothing which falls outside of God’s control and which works contrary to our good. Not one thing falls outside of God’s control. “*All things*” are caused to work together so that God’s will for Him and for us is accomplished.

*“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”* The “*good*” which God brings about is His ultimate good that He has “*for those who are called according to His purpose.*” Since God causes all things to work together for the “*good*” of “*his purpose*” we dare not assume that every individual event or circumstance will be perceived as good at the moment. It will only be recognized as good at the end of the process, when God is finished with His work in and for us whom he has “*called according to his purpose.*” What is the *good* of the *purpose* of God that He *calls* us to? Paul answers that in verses 29-30.

*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.* Romans 8:29-30

Here we read of the glorious fulfillment of the good purpose of God. We can be confident of the fulfillment of God’s good purpose because of God’s grace-filled nature and actions toward us: He foreknew us, predestined us, called us, justified us and glorified us. Each of these natures and actions are the link of “*all things*” bound together in an unbreakable chain that ensures the fulfillment of God’s good purpose. God’s foreknowledge of us, which preceded not only our birth but the foundation of the world, is his loving character toward us. Our knowledge that God causes *all things to work together for good* is based on God’s foreknowledge. The next link is predestination, in which God determined to put his loving character toward us into action. He did so through his calling us with the gospel. In justifying us when we respond in faith to the gospel, he declares us to be a member of family of God – and our future glorification is so certain that Paul can say, in a real sense, that we who have been justified in the present have already been glorified.

What is the *good* of the *purpose* of God that He *calls* us to? Paul tell us *the good purpose of our most sovereign God is that he foreknew us and predestined us and called us and justified us so we might be glorified by being “conformed to the image of his Son”* through pain, suffering and death. Since sin invaded the world, fallen humanity has not borne the image of God as it once did: “*For all of have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23). But now Jesus, the crucified and resurrected Son of God, bears the image of God perfectly, as Colossians 1:15 tell us: “*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.*” And God’s purpose for us is that we also will bear the image of God by replicating the life and death and resurrection through the pain, suffering and death we experience in this life. God’s Word tells us that God *foreknew* Jesus would come into the world and He *predestined* Jesus would *painfully* die on a cross and He *called* Jesus to *suffer* and die on a cross and He *justified* us through Jesus’ *death* for our sins so Jesus would be *glorified* by God through his resurrection from the dead. God allows and sends pain, suffering and death into our lives for the good purpose that we might be “*conformed to the image of his Son*” – as we live out the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The most powerful “*image*” of Jesus is the cross. It tore our Lord Jesus apart when he sought to bring the pain, suffering and death of the world and the love of God together. The cross became the image of God’s love for a wounded world. In Christ we are called to bear that image with Jesus as we groan together with him for the glory to come! “*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*”

If you are here today and you are entering or going through a season of pain or suffering or death – know that our Lord Jesus will walk down the path of pain, suffering and death with you. Jesus not only sacrificed his life on a cross in our place for our sins, so we might be forgiven and redeemed and restored back into a relationship with God – he also wants to care for us and comfort us and heal us and protect us and strengthen us - and fill us with His Holy Spirit and his love and his mercy and his grace and his peace and his hope and his joy – as we live our fallen lives in a fallen world where we were born into *“trouble as the sparks fly upward”* *“during the “few of days” we have on earth that’re “full of trouble.”* In regard to persevering through the struggles and trials of pain, suffering and death - Charles Spurgeon said: *“I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the Rock of Ages.”* What Spurgeon is saying here is that trials are God’s means of drawing us to himself, the Rock of Ages. The wave is a vehicle transporting us to the very doorstep of God Almighty. Spurgeon is not pretending that suffering is easy and we should try harder to persevere. He is not saying pain, trials, and death are good things. *“Kissing the wave”* means we stop flailing our arms in panic and embrace the God who has sovereignly designed our circumstances for our good and his glory. Romans 8:28 is not just a verse for a Christian greeting card, but one branded on our hearts. Pain, suffering and death are not good, but somehow, our most sovereign and God uses them to accomplish His sovereign plan and purpose.

Pain, suffering and death are not only threats in this life, but a promise - because no hardship is bigger, deeper, or lasts longer than God. Pain, suffering and death are the great instruments in God’s hands that reveal to us our dependence on him and our hope in him. God is good to give us the greatest gift he can give us, which is more of himself, and he’s good however he chooses to deliver that gift. Pain, suffering and death purify us, test our faith, grow our faith, help us to comfort others who are hurting and make us more like Jesus. Pain, suffering and death reveals to the world whether Jesus Christ is more precious and more satisfying than all the pleasures and comforts and treasures of this world.

*“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”* What does this look like? Suppose that next year on New Year’s Day you had a really bad day. You get a call from the Canada Revenue that they were going to audit you. While you were out to breakfast, your house started on fire and it completely burned to the ground. The tests came back from your doctor and revealed that you have cancer for which there is no treatment and you have less than six months to live. If someone were to ask you on January 2 how your year was going, you would say that it couldn’t be any worse. But then as the year progressed, Canada Revenue completed their audit and found that you had overpaid your taxes and they send you a \$10,000 refund. Your son and his wife called to tell you that they were pregnant and your first grandchild was born before the end of the year. Your doctor called to tell you that a drug company had just developed a medication that was 100% successful in treating the kind of cancer that you had. And your insurance agent called to let you know they would pay for you to build a brand-new house from the ground up exactly as you wanted - and also pay to replace all your belongings at their full replacement cost and pay for you to live in a nice resort in the meantime, with all costs, even room service and massages at the spa, covered. Now if someone were to ask you how your year went at the end of that year, you would have a completely different answer, wouldn’t you? The apostle Paul is saying that our *“sufferings”* on earth are like that, only all the good things don’t just happen once, they keep on happening year after year for eternity. So no matter how bad your suffering might be today, God has a glorious permanent future for you that is going to make you completely forget your current problems.

There is great deal of pain, suffering and death in this world. Many have been the victims of violence. Others have faced disease, disorders, or disability. Some of us have lost loved ones of late. And yet as followers of Christ, we press on. We don’t give up or wallow in our pain, suffering or loss. We kiss the wave. We don’t do this with a smile on our face, but with a deep-seated joy in our hearts. We can go to sleep at night confidently knowing that our good and sovereign God is doing ten thousand more things in our pain, suffering and loss than we can see right now. This is a subterranean joy that comes when the waters crash over us. Let the waves of your pain, suffering and death take you to Jesus. Amen!

*Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. Isaiah 43:1-3*

*The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. Psalm 34:18*

*He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. Revelation 21:4*

*Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Philippians 3:7-11*

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:1-2*

*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Romans 5:1-5*

*“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”— these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 1 Corinthians 2:9-10*

*For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen! Romans 11:36*

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Pastor Leland Botzet

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