

## "GROANING THEN GLORY"

(Romans 8:18-27)

(Chuck Swindoll)

The problem of evil is difficult for everyone. Non-believers struggle to comprehend how a good, all-powerful God can allow evil to continue. Believers begin to question everything when the intensity of sorrow or suffering becomes unbearable. Even creation itself groans in anguished anticipation for disease, disaster, death, and decay to end. Nevertheless, Paul considered this present suffering to be minor when compared to the glory of eternity (8:17-25).

As I have taught and lived this portion of Scripture for the better part of half a century, I observe two principles at work.

First, *the greater the groan, the greater the glory*. God is not the source of pain, and He did not promise to prevent our suffering. Instead, He promised that no pain would go to waste. What the world intends for harm, God will use for our good. Not only will He make us more like His Son, He will use afflictions to give us a greater capacity for future blessing.

When you find yourself afflicted and suffering, rest assured that however deeply you hurt, your joy will be greater when the trial ends. Therefore, endure with hope—confident assurance.

Second, *the weaker our spirit, the stronger His support*. I recall many times when I barely had the strength to stand in the pulpit on Sunday. One Friday afternoon, our daughter fell to the pavement from a cheerleading pyramid and broke her back. For the next thirty-six hours—Friday night, Saturday, and Saturday night—we sat by her hospital bed praying that her paralysis wouldn't be permanent. With her long-term condition still uncertain, I preached as scheduled on Sunday. I blinked through tears and somehow made my way through the sermon, which had surely flopped. Or so I thought. The recording of that particular sermon ultimately became the most requested of any I had delivered in that church. Why? I am convinced that it was because I preached it in utter weakness.

When affliction and suffering bring you to your knees, that is when the power of God has the greatest effect in your ministry (2 Cor. 12:10). I don't mean to suggest that taking a step back from work isn't sometimes necessary. You should be fit to serve. However, when you do continue ministering to others in the midst of suffering, God multiplies His power in your weakness.

Let me boil this down to several practical dos and don'ts:

- *Don't* assume your suffering is the result of God's punishment.
- *Do* expect that when the suffering ends, He will give you even greater joy.
- *Don't* assume the Lord has abandoned you.
- *Do* confess your fear and doubt, and ask Him for strength to press on.
- *Don't* assume you have been rejected or forsaken by God.
- *Do* remain faithful to your duties, even if you must reduce your load for the time being.
- *Don't* assume your prayers are not heard.
- *Do* continue praying, even when you don't know what to say.
- *Don't* assume that your suffering gives you permission to give up.
- *Do* trust that the Lord will magnify His strength through your weakness.



Jesus warned His followers that the world would hate them on His account and mistreatment would mark their days as certainly as it did His (John 15:18-19; 16:33). Nevertheless, His experience established the pattern for us. "In the days of His flesh, [Jesus] offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered" (Heb. 5:7-8). He shared in our suffering; soon we shall share in His glory! How great is that?