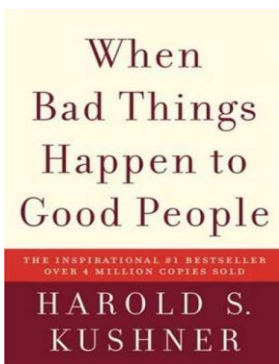


*<sup>17</sup> For <sup>i</sup>this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup> <sup>j</sup>as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*

*For we know that if <sup>k</sup>the tent that is <sup>l</sup>our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, <sup>m</sup>a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. <sup>2</sup> For in this tent <sup>n</sup>we groan, longing to <sup>o</sup>put on our heavenly dwelling, <sup>3</sup> if indeed by putting it on <sup>1</sup> we may not be found naked. <sup>4</sup> For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal <sup>p</sup>may be swallowed up by life. <sup>5</sup> He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, <sup>q</sup>who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.*

*<sup>6</sup> So we are always of good courage. We know that <sup>r</sup>while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, <sup>7</sup> for <sup>s</sup>we walk by faith, not <sup>t</sup>by sight. <sup>8</sup> Yes, we are of good courage, and we <sup>u</sup>would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. <sup>9</sup> So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to <sup>v</sup>please him. <sup>10</sup> For <sup>w</sup>we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, <sup>x</sup>so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. (ESV)*



When it comes to the topic of suffering, perhaps the best known book in the general public is *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. The book published thirty years ago by a conservative Jewish rabbi named Harold Kushner and has sold many millions of copies. His book was written out of intense personal experience after his fourteen year old son died from a degenerative and incurable genetic disease. He draws two main conclusions in the book. The first conclusion is that bad things happen to good people because God does not possess the power to stop the bad things from happening. God may be saddened by these awful things and he may even shed a tear over them, but he is just as helpless to stop them as you and I. A friend of Karen's used this book as her primary text in order to write a paper denying the existence of God. Kushner's second main point is that bad things can bring about the formation of good character in people. He lists all of the beneficial ways that he and his family had grown through watching his son get sicker and sicker and eventually succumb to the disease. While Kushner was thankful for these character benefits, he concluded that he would trade all of

them just to get his son back. To my knowledge, this is the most popular book on how to deal with human suffering.

We know that this is a woefully inadequate and ultimately blasphemous view of why God allows human suffering. We know there are good answers to this problem, of suffering but many of us don't have a good handle on these answers. When we think of trials, many of us instinctively are drawn to James 1. *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, <sup>3</sup> because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. <sup>4</sup> Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.* We also gravitate toward Romans 8:28. *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.* These are two of the most precious passages in all of the New Testament to help us in our trials and suffering, but these are not the only ones.

When I read the passage you may have noticed that I included the last two verses of chapter four in with chapter five. I intentionally did this because I skipped over a key part of this verse last week. *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.* We rightly focused our attention on the contrast between our light momentary afflictions and the eternal weight of glory. Do you recall how I explained the phrase “beyond all comparison”? The weight of glory that awaits us is not a thing but rather a person, our priceless treasure Jesus Christ. Paul described this treasure as a hyperbole times a hyperbole. A true exaggeration multiplied by a true exaggeration. This weight of glory our priceless treasure is truly “beyond all comparison.” But in contrasting our light momentary afflictions with the eternal weight of glory, we missed an extremely important part of this verse.

If I write it out this way you may be able to see more clearly what I mean.

*For this light momentary affliction  
is preparing for us  
an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison*

Can you see the part we skipped over? Our light momentary afflictions—which Paul readily admits are not easy, merely light in comparison to the eternal weight of glory—are not meant only to be compared with the eternal weight of glory, but rather our light momentary afflictions actually are preparing us for the eternal weight of glory. Step back for a moment and let that thought sink in. The suffering and afflictions in this life not only help us in this life—the testing of our faith that develops perseverance as it says in James—but this same suffering and afflictions actually prepare us for the eternal weight of glory. Our trials prepare us for Heaven. Our difficulties prepare us for an eternity with Jesus. What we want to do for the rest of our time together this morning is examine chapter five to see precisely how suffering prepares us for eternity.

Let's start with verse one. *For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.* The tent to which Paul refers is our earthly, human bodies. Tents are wonderful things. Some of you have spent countless nights sleeping in tents on weekend or longer camping trips. These tents have

enabled you to get away and relax in the woods. They have enabled you to go places you might not otherwise go, but would any of you be willing to permanently live in your tent? Would you choose your tent over your home? None of us would ever do that because we know that a tent is not a permanent home. This is an interesting analogy that Paul used because what was Paul's occupation? He was a tentmaker. He used the income from making and selling tents to fund his church planting efforts. Paul would have had a high regard for the occupation and final product of tent making. But he also knew that tents were not meant to be permanent.

Some of you might be thinking, "But what about the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—didn't they all live in tents their whole lives"? Indeed they did, but that's just the point—they were all nomads, continually moving from one place to another. Sometimes they moved because God called them to a new location. Sometimes they moved because they were running away from a famine. Jacob moved because he was running for his life from his brother Esau. Even more than you and I they would have understood that tents were not permanent homes. Some of the Bible quizzers in the room will know John 14:2. See if this looks accurate to you. *In my Father's land are many tents; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a pup tent for you.* Or how about Revelation 21? Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy Tent coming down out of heaven from God. God is not preparing tents and pavilions for us. He is preparing building and cities, the Holy City Jerusalem, the city that measures 1400 miles long and 1400 miles wide and 1400 miles high. God is preparing permanent homes for us as the real John 14 says, *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.* That's the whole point—so that we can be with Jesus. Even though Jesus is with us, we are not yet with him in the fullest sense.

But lest I confuse you with mixed metaphors let me point out that the comparison between our earthy tents and the "building from God" is not the mansions in glory that we sing about but rather our glorified bodies. Our bodies are temporary tents but God plans for us to abide in glorified bodies—*a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.* Paul is referring to our resurrected bodies. I love the word *if* in this verse. *For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.* Do we even need the word "if" here? What is the mortality rate of the human race? Even if you include Enoch and Elijah in the equation, the death rate is still 99.9999999999%. But the Greek word here for *if* is more of a rhetorical if which really means *when*. *When* our earthly tent is destroyed we have a building from God.

This promise of glorified bodies that no longer waste away is better anticipated by the verses 2-4. <sup>2</sup> *For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling,* <sup>3</sup> *if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked.* <sup>4</sup> *For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.* The older I get the more real this verse becomes—for in this tent we groan. Paul literally means in this body we groan. Can anyone else relate to this or is it just me? Has your body groaned lately? Some of you groan with daily, constant chronic pain but even if your groaning is not continual, we all know the groans of our bodies, whether it is a nasty cold or a life threatening disease.

Do you see the purpose of this groaning? Paul said that we groan, *longing to put on our heavenly dwelling*. God has ordained that even our groaning actually has a purpose—so that we will long to put on our heavenly dwelling. As a pastor and preacher, I always want to be as faithful as possible to Scripture but also make my messages as relevant as possible. Some preachers will sacrifice faithfulness to Scripture in the pursuit of relevance, but as I think about this hopeful groaning, is anything more relevant than this? First, the Bible is extremely relevant in the recognition of our daily groaning. And Paul says the same thing twice in two verses. Verse two—*For in this tent we groan* and again in verse four—*For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened*. This is a frank admission that life is hard and our bodies are in pain. Our daily affliction, though they truly are light and momentary compared to eternity, are nevertheless very real and often overwhelming. The message they send to us is this: something is not right. I am not yet complete. Something is missing. In verse three Paul even goes so far as to call this longing ‘nakedness’. The imperfection and groaning of our present body is like being unclothed compared to the future promise of a glorified, resurrected body. This nakedness and sense of incompleteness is the very thing which is supposed to increase our longing for our resurrected bodies. The Bible never pretends that life is bed of roses and that all we need to do is to grin and bear it—or worse—pretend that we really are not in pain—that it is all an illusion. The Bible does not ask us to bury our heads—or our pain in the sand. When properly understood, our groaning is not only natural, it is a good thing when it leads us to a heavenly longing.

But at the same time, we must be careful that our groaning does not grumbling. There is a very fine line between groaning and grumbling. In fact, the word for groan can be translated as either hopeful groaning or sinful grumbling. In James 5:9 we see the sinful grumbling. *Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!* But in Romans 8:22-23 the exact same word is used for a hopeful groaning. *We know that the whole creation has been **groaning** as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.* <sup>23</sup> *Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, **groan** inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.)*

We need to be continually aware of the difference between sinful grumbling and hopeful groaning. Hopeful groaning reveals a deep level of contentment but not complacency. Hopeful groaning gladly accepts what the Lord has given you—that is you are content—but you are not satisfied with where you are at, meaning you are not complacent. You want to grow more in holiness and grace. You want to know Christ more and finally, your hopeful groaning reminds you that you want to be clothed with your heavenly body. We long to put on our heavenly dwelling. Unfortunately, far too many Christians have this flipped upside down—they are complacent, but not content. They groan about things that don't matter but they could care less about the things that do. They don't dwell on heaven and Christ and their future resurrected body but instead focus only on their aches and pains.

Can't you see—your aches and pains are given to you to lead you away from sinful grumbling and toward hopeful groaning. This is not to say that we should be happy about our groaning or should not try to alleviate our aches and pains. On the one hand my migraine headache can lead me toward hopeful groaning and the longing for my heavenly body. But if this is true, does it mean that I am sinning if I take ibuprofen to kill the pain? Should I rather not let the migraine

lead me to more hopeful groaning? This would be a wrong application of this message. It is not wrong to want to have less affliction and bodily groaning. If ibuprofen—or as Don Eisermann calls it, The Breakfast of Champions—helps you to get through the day and alleviates some pain, by all means, take advantage of these God given gifts. God has given all people the common grace to help with pain and cure diseases and reduce or even eliminate suffering in some cases, but this side of Heaven there will be no cure for suffering and death. Therefore, in the meantime, pray and work toward renewing your mind and change your sinful grumbling into hopeful groaning.

We are not studying Romans 8 this morning but I wanted to take a moment and focus on 8:23. *Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.* This verse is quite striking because it links our adoption as sons and daughters with the redemption of our bodies. Doesn't that just blow you away? All believers have an inheritance and the reason we have an inheritance because we are being adopted into God's family. Throughout Scripture, inheritances are always reserved for the closest family members. Remember that before Isaac was born, Ishmael was due to receive all of the inheritance from Abraham. But after Isaac was born, he became the heir apparent to the primary inheritance. Here's a question for you—have we been adopted into God's family? There is a sense in which this inheritance and privilege is already ours. If you have trusted in Christ alone for your salvation, then you are son or daughter of the Lord and Father. But the full measure of our adoption is still part of our future inheritance. The Bible continually holds this tension between what is often referred to as the “already but not yet”. We already have our salvation but we do not yet have it in full measure. Moreover, this verse inextricably links our glorified bodies with our adoption as sons and daughters. Our adoption as sons and daughters is complete when our bodies are redeemed and we are clothed with our heavenly dwelling.

This leads to the primary reason for our longing and groaning. We receive glorified, perfect, resurrected bodies that will never decay not as an end in and of itself, but as a means to an end. We will dwell in these bodies not merely so that we can experience an absence of pain but so that we can enjoy and treasure Christ forever. This is precisely what Paul wrote next. *So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord,<sup>7</sup> for we walk by faith, not by sight.<sup>8</sup> Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.*

You will run into Christians who don't get this right. They seem to be only or at least overly interested in all of the good things in Heaven that await us, least of all the removal of sin and suffering. Some seem to be so caught up in these other things that they seem to forget that Heaven is Jesus. Jesus is the center of Heaven, the reason for Heaven, the core of Heaven. If Jesus were not in Heaven, what would it be? By definition it would be hell. Hell is the absence of God, therefore a heaven without Jesus would be hell. Jesus is the center and focus of heaven, however, it is fascinating that all of this enjoyment of God is part and parcel to possessing a resurrected body. This is part of what might be called a secondary joy of Heaven. Listen to how Randy Alcorn describes it.

We must understand that all secondary joys, including all the secondary joys of our current life and our lives to come in Heaven, are *derivative* in nature. They cannot be separated from God. Flowers are beautiful for one reason—God is beautiful. Rainbows are stunning because God is stunning. Puppies are delightful because God is delightful. Sports are fun because God is fun. Study is rewarding because God is rewarding. Work is fulfilling because God is fulfilling.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, even our resurrected bodies will help us enjoy heaven. They are a means to the end of enjoying God forever. We would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord—and we will. But in the meantime, we should possess good courage to fight the every day battles of life. And until our earthly tent is destroyed, we walk by faith and not by sight. This one verse could be a sermon unto itself. People have written countless sermons on this verse. Entire books have been written on this verse. It's a simple thing to understand that we walk by faith and not by sight in regard to our resurrected bodies and eternity. No one has been there and came back to tell us about it. I don't put any stock in near death experiences. You might find them interesting, but are you going to put your trust in such things? Actually, some has been there and told us about it. His name is Jesus and I put all of my stock in what he says.

I have one key question in regard to verse seven. What is the difference between having faith and walking by faith? When we think of faith we usually dissolve it down and make it mean belief. Faith is a belief, it's what you think and believe about a particular subject, in this case, everything about eternity. This is basically an accurate statement. Faith is believing and believing is expressing faith. But what is the difference between having faith and walking by faith? To walk by faith is to order one's life and priorities according to one's beliefs. To conduct your life and behave in such a way that what you *believe* cannot help but shape what you *do*. It's not really that different from what James meant when he wrote, "Faith without works is dead." If you cannot order your life by what you believe then you really don't believe that thing, isn't that right? If I believe that at noon this afternoon Viroqua is going to be the epicenter of a 9.7 earthquake but I chose to stay right here in Viroqua, could you say that I actually believed it? In no sense would that be true. If I believed that a 9.7 earthquake was coming, walking by that faith would necessitate specific and immediate action.

When we walk by faith our life choices and daily behaviors are patterned after our belief. If our belief is that suffering is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory, how do we walk in that belief? How do we walk by faith? We have already established that the groaning of our body are reminders of our longing for eternity. To think in this way is not pie in the sky, other-worldly meditations. This is sound Biblical thinking. Some of you have read John Piper's book, *Don't Waste Your Life*. He is also known for saying, "Don't waste your pain" and "Don't waste your cancer". My migraines and your cancer and our all of our daily aches and groans are gifts to help increase our longing to be in the presence of Christ and all of the gifts and pleasures that come with being with him. Second, do not allow your hopeful groaning to become sinful grumblings. If you believe these things this is how you will walk by faith.

Finally, in verse nine Paul gave one more simple way to walk by faith. *So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him*. Here are four more similar reminders in Scripture.

Rom 12.1—Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.

Rom 14.18—because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

Eph 5.10—and find out what pleases the Lord.

Col 3.20—Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.



For many people, thinking about pleasing the Lord or preparing for eternity is a bit overwhelming. It is too big of a concept to keep in mind. Let me try to illustrate the concept of pleasing the Lord with a story about the sport of ringette. Ringette is a sport neatly identical to hockey but it is played with a straight stick and a rubber ring. The sport is dominated by women and it is very popular in Canada. I was listening to this radio interview of the best female player in Canada describing her early frustration with

the game. She had natural talent but she was frustrated that she was not scoring enough goals and winning enough games. Eventually she realized that she was concentrating on the wrong goal, so to speak. A goal of scoring goals was too large of a concept so she decided to break it down into smaller steps. She began to focus her efforts on the specific parts of her game that would be necessary to score a goal such as: how to approach the net, what moves of her skates and stick did she need to emphasize. She became a student of the job of a goalie so she could figure out small ways to beat each goalie. She poured all of her effort into studying and improving on these smaller pieces of the puzzle and guess what? She started scoring more goals. So it can be with pleasing the Lord. If you just focus on tomorrow, finding what pleases the lord and doing that one thing, and if you do it the next day and the day after that, guess what? You will be pleasing the Lord. You prepare for eternity by pleasing the Lord today.

Rich Maurer  
April 3, 2011

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<sup>i</sup> Rom. 8:18; 1 Pet. 1:6; 5:10; [Ps. 30:5; Isa. 54:7]

<sup>j</sup> ch. 5:7; Rom. 8:24; Heb. 11:1, 13

<sup>k</sup> 2 Pet. 1:13, 14

<sup>l</sup> See ch. 4:7

<sup>m</sup> Mark 14:58

<sup>n</sup> Rom. 8:23

<sup>o</sup> [1 Cor. 15:53, 54]

<sup>1</sup> Some manuscripts *putting it off*

<sup>p</sup> 1 Cor. 15:54

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<sup>q</sup> [Rom. 8:23]; See ch. 1:22

<sup>r</sup> [Heb. 11:13, 14]

<sup>s</sup> [John 20:29]; See ch. 4:18

<sup>t</sup> 1 Cor. 13:12

<sup>u</sup> [Phil. 1:23]

<sup>v</sup> [Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 4:1]

<sup>w</sup> Matt. 25:31, 32; [Rom. 14:10]; See Acts 10:42

<sup>x</sup> See Ps. 62:12

<sup>1</sup> Randy Alcorn, *Enjoying God and Enjoying Heaven: Why They are Inseparable?*, January 14, 2010. Eternal Perspective Ministries, accessed on April 1, 2011.