

Divine Art

"We are, not metaphorically but in very truth, a Divine work of art, something that God is making, and therefore something with which he will not be satisfied until it has a certain character... Over a sketch made idly to amuse a child, an artist may not take much trouble: he may be content to let it go even though it is not exactly as he meant it to be. But over the great picture of his life—the work which he loves, though in a different fashion, as intensely as a man loves a woman or a mother a child—he will take endless trouble—and would, doubtless, thereby give endless trouble to the picture if it were sentient. One can imagine a sentient picture, after being rubbed and scraped and recommenced for the tenth time, wishing that it were only a thumbnail sketch whose making was over in a minute. In the same way, it is natural for us to wish that God had designed for us a less glorious and less arduous destiny; but then we are wishing not for more love but for less." C.S. Lewis - The Problem of Pain

"On that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious..." Isaiah 4:2

Monday – Suffering and Glory

"The pain passes, but the beauty remains." Renoir

1. Please read Romans 8:18-27. Why would Paul, who suffered immensely throughout his life, want us to keep in mind that suffering is a *temporary* condition (see Rom. 8:17-18 and 2 Cor. 4:17-18)?
2. Paul uses the word "glory" approximately 20 times in Romans. What do he and other biblical writers mean by the term?
3. Both Peter (1 Pet. 4:12-13) and Paul (Rom. 5:1-3) suggest that suffering is the gateway to glory. Why is it important to consider our future glory in the midst of our suffering?

Tuesday – The Fall of Creation

"Paul shared the commonly held view that the subhuman creation had been involved in the fall of the human race; the ground had been cursed for Adam's sake, and, deprived of its proper control, nature had become red in tooth and claw. Thus for Paul the whole natural order is subject to the law of decay." G.B. Caird

1. According to Psalm 8:3-6, what was God's intention for humanity prior to the Fall? What role did humans play in creation (Ps. 8:6-8)? How did this drastically change when man sinned against God?
2. How did Adam's sin impact creation (see Gen. 3:17)? What explanation do Genesis 3:15-24 and Romans 8:20 provide for the existence of natural disasters, pain, and death?
3. What "hope" does God offer in Genesis 3:15 and Romans 8:19-25?

Wednesday – Redemption of Creation

"But [creation's] slavery, like all slaveries in the Bible, is then given its exodus, its moment of release, when God does for the whole cosmos what he did for Jesus at Easter." N.T. Wright - Evil and the Justice of God

1. Please read Romans 8:19-21 and Hebrews 2:5-10. How is God going to reverse the curse of Genesis and bring about humanity's glorious future (as seen in Psalm 8)?
2. How will creation's liberation go hand-in-hand with humanity's liberation?

Digging Deeper – Normally, when we think about salvation we think in terms of what Christ has done for people. In what way does Romans 8:19-24 *broaden* the commonly held meaning of salvation?

Thursday – Groaning and Longing for God's Kingdom

"The kingdoms of this world are to become the kingdom of God, so the beauty of this world will be enfolded in the beauty of God—and not just the beauty of God himself, but the beauty which, because God is the creator par excellence, he will create when the present world is rescued, healed, restored, and completed."

N.T. Wright - Simply Christian

1. Read Romans 8:21-23. What does Paul mean when he speaks of groaning. Why is groaning a normative part of Christianity?
2. How are the ideas of Romans 8:21-23 similar to the words of Jesus in John 16:21-22, 33? How do these verses give us perspective about the world we live in, its future, and our joyous life with Christ?

Making it Personal – As you consider your life, in what ways recently have you experienced the groaning referred to by Paul?

Friday – Hope

"As long as matters are really hopeful, hope is a mere flattery or platitude; it is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to be a strength at all." G.K. Chesterton - Heretics

1. Read Romans 8:24-25. Why is it especially critical to hope in God in spite of our circumstances and feelings? Why is "patience" an important Christian value and an essential characteristic of hope?
2. What hopeful promises does the book of Revelation offer us (see Revelation 21:4; 24-27; 22:1-5)? What will the "new heaven and new earth" be like? How will it be different than it is today?

Making it Personal - What do you look forward to most at the culmination of God's kingdom?

For the Weekend – Praying in the Spirit

"Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears." William Wordsworth - Intimations of Immortality...

1. What lessons can be learned about prayer from Romans 8:26-27?
2. What role does the Spirit play in helping us through the suffering we face (Rom. 8:26-27)? What complementary role does Jesus play (see 2 Cor. 1:3-5)?
3. Why is it essential for the Holy Spirit to intercede on our behalf, especially during troubling times?