



# #8 “what about suffering?”

To consider how the Christian person should understand the place of suffering in their lives (Romans 8:28-39).



Sue Sylvester is the chief antagonist in the hit TV show “Glee”. In one episode, one of the characters says to her: “what happened to you Sue? Tell me. What horrible, horrible thing made you into such a miserable tyrant?”

SUE: “Since I was a little girl, I had exactly one hero – my big sister. How much I worshipped her! She was the sun and the moon to me. While I was still very young I noticed that other people didn’t feel the way I did. People were rude to her. They were cruel. They laughed at her. And so I began to pray. I prayed every night for her to get better and nothing changed. So I prayed harder and after a while I realized that **it wasn’t that I was praying hard enough, it was that no-one was listening**”.

Q1. Why does the character Sue Sylvester give up on God?

“Romans” is a letter in the latter half of the Bible. It is believed to have been written around 60’s AD, by the Apostle Paul, to the young church in Rome (hence the name). Paul wanted to encourage the church by explaining the “gospel” to them. The key sentence of the letter is this: **“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...” [Romans 1:16]**<sup>1</sup>

The word “gospel” just means good news. The good news is to do with salvation – with being saved from God’s anger at humanity. It’s a solution that God himself provides in the sacrifice of his son Jesus (see session 1 on Romans 1:18-32, and session 2 on Romans 3:21-26). It’s a solution that requires trusting God’s promise that Jesus’ death is enough to pay for our wrongdoing (see session 3 on Romans 4:18-25). Two of the benefits of relationship with God are peace and hope (see session 4 on Romans 5:1-11). Jesus’ sacrificial death on behalf of others is a powerful incentive to obey God rather than indulge in wrongdoing (session 5 on Romans 6:1-14).

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The normal life experience of the Christian person is an on-going struggle with sin (session 6 on Romans 7:7-25). There is power to change, and an obligation to change, thanks to God's Spirit (session 7 on Romans 8:1-17). But how is the Christian person to understand the suffering that they go through, which also comes under God's hand?

### **Romans 8:28-39**

**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. 29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.**

**31 What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”<sup>2</sup>**

**37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Q2. “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him”. How would the character Sue Sylvester react to those words? [hint: see Romans 8:28-29]

To answer the next question, it will be helpful to keep the following in mind (this is the next stage in Paul's argument):

### **Romans 9:15-16**

**<sup>15</sup> For he [God] says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” <sup>16</sup> It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.**

Q3. In Romans 8:28-30, what confidence boost does Paul give to the readers in terms of them actually making it to the end and sharing in the glory?

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<sup>2</sup> Paul is quoting from the Old Testament, Psalm 44:22.

Q4. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" In what ways is God on the side of his people?  
[hint: see Romans 8:31-34]

In a sense, the unanswered prayer conquers the character Sue Sylvester's trust in God.

Q5. What will help a Christian person to 'conquer' suffering rather than being conquered by it?  
[Romans 8:37]

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