

The Circle of Life

February 28, 2021 | Romans 12:12

Overview

If someone asked you to describe *in one sentence* what the interior life of a Christian is like, you might do no better than to quote Romans 12:12. Our internal world is about being joyful in hope, patient in affliction, devoted in prayer. That's how we roll. These three attitudes are who we are and "how we do." They get us through the day. They are our Circle of Life.

Joyful in hope

Like the old leadership principle says, we start with the end in mind: *Hope*. This is our vital optimism in the Lord for a glorious future. "We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:2). We will see it and share in it. We will be fully transformed and finally brought into eternal bliss. This is divinely guaranteed. It cannot *not* happen.

But we have to wait for it, and that's hard. Yet it's hard like the week before vacation is hard: We're stressed and burdened with so much, *but next week we're on the beach!* That hope, that future, gets us through. And don't forget the importance of God's Word in fueling hope.

George Mueller says, "The first, great, and primary business to which I ought to attend every day is to have my soul happy in the Lord." Every time we open our Bibles we are hoisting our sails to hope—which God then fills with the truth of his personal nature, awesome promises, and saving acts.



Patient in affliction

The biblical idea of patience is not merely "to put up with" but to "remain under." Intentionally. Purposefully. Because God is developing us. He is making us perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (James 1:2-4). God actually causes every trouble to work for us, to achieve something in us (2 Cor. 4:17). So while it seems sometimes like God is treating us unfairly, giving us more hardship than we deserve, we know that one day the "injustice" will be seen in the opposite direction. We'll be so beautiful and glorious that our former troubles will look "light and momentary," not even worthy of comparison. Maybe one day we'll cry: *It's not fair! The eternal rewards are so out of proportion to the temporal trials. It's too much. God, you're too good!*

Devoted in prayer

Half of the 10 times the New Testament uses the word *devoted*, it refers to prayer. That tells us that prayer is normal and necessary but not easy. We *devote* ourselves to things that do not come naturally.



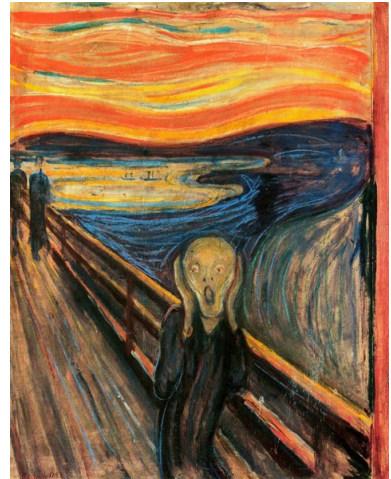
Yet prayer is the communion and communication with God in heaven that gets us through this grueling life on earth. And God delights in our prayers. He invites us to cast *all* our cares on him because he cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). What if we processed all our pain and problems with God just like with a therapist? What if we talked it all out, not with vague thoughts but real words? It might just carry us right back up to rejoicing in hope.

Our Transformed Life
Living the Vision of Romans 12

Discussion Guide

1. This message opened with a brief discussion of Edvard Munch's famous painting known as *The Scream*, which bears the tiny inscription, "Could only have been painted by a madman!"

- Do you agree with that statement?
- Where others saw a bright sunset, Munch "sensed a scream passing through nature," the sky letting out a bloody shriek. Do you ever see life through that lens? How many times a day could you respond to life with a shriek emoji?
- There's a growing mental health crisis in our world that may be the true pandemic. Where do you see it? How do you experience it (if you are willing to share)?



2. Let's talk about rejoicing in hope:

- What do you think is the difference between biblical hope and worldly wishes and dreams?
- What have you've learned about being joyful in hope even when life is hard? What works for you?
- Read Romans 5:1-5, 1 John 3:2, and Isaiah 57:15. What encourages your heart in these texts? What are some other passages that produce hope and joy in you?

3. Now let's talk about patience in affliction:

- Read 1 Corinthians 4:17, then think about the greatest suffering you've ever faced. Can you even imagine someday calling that "light and momentary"? What do you do with a statement like that?
- An implication of this verse is that each particular trouble you face now will produce a distinctive, peculiar glory in you later. So play with that thought. Apply it. What might that mean for your "greatest suffering"?

4. Finally, let's talk about devotion in prayer:

- Almost no one says that they pray as much or as well as they should. Would you say that about yourself? Why is prayer so hard?
- 1 Peter 5:7 says, "Cast all your cares on him because he cares for you." In the sermon it was suggested that we talk all our troubles through with God just like we would our therapist. Do you ever pray like that? Does it help? Explain.

5. Look again at Romans 12:12 in the circle graphic and give yourself a 1-10 rating in each area: "joyful in hope, patient in affliction, devoted in prayer."

- Where are you strongest and weakest?
- What's a good next step for you to take to grow in your weakest area?

"Prayer is the measure of the man spiritually in a way that nothing else is, so that how we pray is as important a question as we can ever face."

J.I. Packer