

**Lenses that Last**  
Small Group Discussion  
Romans 8:18-39

**Intro questions**

- Pastor Josh began by talking about the concept of “schema.” In psychology, a schema is a pattern of thought or behavior that organizes information into categories. You might also describe it as a script that helps you to handle certain experiences, or lenses through which you look at a situation. When is a time that you encountered a situation where you had no schema, or script, for how to approach it?
- Today’s Bible Study has to do with seeing our experiences of pain and suffering through the *lenses* of the Big Story. What is your life like currently in this respect—are you in the throes of pain, or in a calmer season, or somewhere in between?

1. Read Romans 8:18-25. Then discuss the following.
  - a. Verse 18 is Paul’s “thesis” statement for the following paragraphs. What comparison does Paul draw in v. 18? What does this tell you about what he is trying to do in the following passage?
  - b. In v. 20, what explanation does Paul give for the current state of decay and frustration that exists in the created order? How would you say this in your own words, with your knowledge of Genesis 3 as a background?
  - c. Why are the last two words of v. 20 (along with the ensuing verse) so important for Paul’s argument here? What does this say about the future of the material creation?
  - d. What metaphor does Paul use in v. 22 for the state of frustration (or futility) that is our present reality? How does this comparison give us hope?
  - e. Pastor Josh described this “Big Story lens” as follows: We have a **light at the end of the tunnel**. What specific details about this light at the end of the tunnel does Paul give in v. 23?
  - f. In light of the “labor pains” metaphor, does the knowledge of our future glory help you in your current trials?
2. Read Romans 8:26-27. Then discuss the following.
  - a. Have you ever had an experience where you didn’t even know what to pray? How did you deal with that?
  - b. How does the Holy Spirit help us in such situations?
  - c. Pastor Josh described this “Big Story lens” as follows: We have an **unseen translator**. How does this metaphor help you understand the Holy Spirit’s role in these difficulties?
  - d. How should this fact affect the way that we pray?
  - e. Does this lens bring you any measure of comfort in your current circumstances?

3. Read Romans 8:28-30.
  - a. Paul proceeds to give another lens on suffering in v. 28. To whom does this principle apply?
  - b. How could it be painful to quote Romans 8:28 to someone in the midst of hardship?
  - c. How does v. 29 define the “good” toward which God is working on our behalf in our circumstances? How does this relate to the image of God in us, and the effect that sin has had on that image?
  - d. What is the point of v. 30? (Hint: Try not to get lost in the big words, but to see the entire sequence as a whole).
  - e. Pastor Josh described this “Big Story lens” as follows: In every **circumstance**, we are **regain**ing what we lost. How does this fact change the way that you look at hardship?
  - f. Sometimes we can see in the short-term how God has worked for our good in trials. In other experiences, we aren’t able to see how God has worked even after many years. What is an example of a time when you have seen God’s hand at work for your good? Is there anything you’ve been wrestling with where you still haven’t been able to see God’s hand?
  
4. Read Romans 8:31-39.
  - a. In v. 31, Paul says, “If God is for us...” Based on v. 32, how do we already know that God is for us?
  - b. Pastor Josh said the fourth “Big Story lens” is, We have **proof** that God is **for us**. How does the sacrifice of Jesus prove that God is for us?
  - c. How should this knowledge impact the way we view our hardships in life?
  - d. In vv. 33-35, Paul asks three rhetorical questions. What are they, and what point is he trying to make?
  - e. What does it mean to be a “more than conqueror?” (v. 37)
  
5. Pastor Josh summarized Paul’s words in this passage as follows: **When you put on these lenses of the Big Story—what God is doing from start to finish—even the worst circumstances in life become opportunities to experience God’s love.**
  - a. To date, how have you experienced God’s redeeming love in the midst of difficult circumstances?
  - b. How do the people of God often serve as conduits (to one another) of that love in hardship?
  - c. In what area do you need to experience God’s love currently?
  - d. Does one of these “lenses” strike you as being especially helpful for you in your current season of life? Why?

### Prayer

- If people have already been vulnerable about what they’re struggling with, spend some time praying openly for those needs.
- If your group members have not yet shared openly, ask them to share now about some real needs they have, and then spend time praying for those as a group.