

Weekender Slide

Romans Series Slide

Let's start today with 3 statements

Art is Beauty produced through Suffering.

God is an Artist.

Life is Art.

Let me shed a little light on those 3 statements.

In a kind of way- any time you take some raw materials- and fashion them together to make something new- you could classify it as art- I think especially if there is intent to connect with/disturb/ or encourage a person's whole being- mental, emotional, spiritual and even physical.

The point is- to make something- a story, a poem, a chair- requires some level of sweat, or stress, or brain strain.

In fact- you often find some of the greatest artists are people who deeply tap into that suffering and pain- to make something beautiful.

Van Gogh's Starry Night was his view from his room in his Mental Asylum.

Sometimes- art itself is intended to bring about discomfort or suffering in us in order to make us into something more beautiful. Think about a sad song- that brings up memories of a hard time in your life- or a story that you read that makes you face the fact that you are hypocrite and need to change your ways.

There is a story in the OT after King David has an affair with Bathsheba, where the prophet Nathan comes in and tells him a story of a rich man who is stealing sheep. And it stirs King David's emotions to the point he is ready to kill the man- Then Nathan says- "You're the man!"

Now- that took some suffering on Nathan's part- not only to come up with the idea- but because he was about to confront a king with a message that could get himself killed or thrown in prison.

And- that story, that piece of art- wasn't merely something for David to admire- it upset him- stirred his emotions- and brought him to repentance. It made David himself more beautiful.

So- Art is beauty produced through suffering.

Second- God is an artist. God created something from nothing. And not everything for a utilitarian purpose. He made trees beautiful and created banana slugs. He speaks in the Scripture through the broken artists of humanity- poetry and story and especially in the Prophets performance art)- makes up a vast majority of the OT, and in the NT- you find Jesus answering very few questions directly- rather with parables- short stories that or phrases where he says “Go and learn what this means.”

And he made humans as the crown piece of his creation- and then- through our rejection of him- we became the primary source of God’s pain and suffering. The art stirring the heart of the artist.

And so- if God is the author of life- and God is an artist- it means that all of life is a work of art. A painting. A movie. A story. And it follows that we should expect for that art to disrupt us- bring us suffering- that will result in beauty.

To top it all off. The scripture says that we are MADE in GOD’S IMAGE. Which means that God- as the chief Artist- made humanity not only to BE works of art- but to BE ARTISTS- to bring about beauty through suffering.

Ok- file that away for a minute.

Now I want to show you a couple of pictures to represent an idea... so that when we read this Scripture in a few moments- we start to see not only something beautiful- but also- the danger in losing this beauty.

The following images come from Cultural Commentator Ted Gioia. who released this week his 2024 state of the culture.

BTW- I HIGHLY recommend this article to you (it will be in my manuscript which is posted on Monday on our website and app)

<https://www.honest-broker.com/p/the-state-of-the-culture-2024>

PIC 1

First- He says a lot of us break things down into two categories. There is art that challenges us- and entertainment that gives us what we want.

This is the old adage- “Oh I don’t want to watch a movie that I have to think about, just give me something mindless to relax to”- No comment on that phrase...just giving you a paradigm....which is worth 20 cents.

Pic 2

Ted says- actually- what ended up happening- is entertainment- that tends to give us what makes us feel good- is the choice most of us make- and so entertainment tends to swallow up art- because it has less suffering associated with it.

In recent years however- really in the last year- Disney profit started tanking. The Marvel movies- that used to be an easy payday- stopped drawing people's eyeballs. Because- people's attention couldn't even be captivated anymore by superhero films. Now- our eyeballs have been captivated by distraction- not entertainment.

Pic 3

Short videos- reels, tik toks, that draw our eyeballs in. They grab our attention for literally a few seconds- then we are shuffled on to a new image- a new idea- a new thought. The Doom Scroll.

This, of course- our attention- is one of the most valuable products in the world to advertisers. So it has become extremely profitable to simply get attention- in order to GET something from us- Instead of creating art- which inherently GIVES something to those to us. But beholding art- also involves being willing to be challenged- its a slow work- and cant really compete with entertainment in the excitement category- and has no shot against a distraction culture.

And sense distraction is so profitable- at least in the short term- it behooves those who can profit from it- if we're addicted to distraction.

Pic 4

Enter- the dopamine loop. Now we are into brain chemicals. I dont to want belabor this picture- other than to say we now have the science that we can use distraction to addict people to pleasure and squeeze their money out of them while they are under the illusion that they are freely choosing something good for them. It is the embodiment of Aldous Huxley's 20th century novel *A Brave New World*- which no one is going to be able to read and understand because we'll be too hooked on the dopamine boosts from our distractions to see it happening.

Which leads to this final picture.

Pic 5

Ted Gioia calls it how Silicon Valley views Culture (Which i admit is a broad generalization, but there is a reason that Steve Jobs didn't let his kids have ipads while he massed produced them for everyone elses)

This is not producing a flourishing or a beautiful society. It is and has been producing a chronically anxious, self-centered, society that has become deeply fearful and avoidant of the very means through which we will become beautiful.

But- at least we are distracted from that reality as we are milked for our attention and money.

Title- “God is an Artist: How He Changes Suffering to Beauty”- Romans 8:18-30

I sincerely hope- that this is the absolute low point of this sermon.

None of this is anything to panic about. I’m not asking you to throw your phone in the trash or to protest the new Apple vision goggles.

What I am asking you to do- is to-- understand and value that true artistry is slow- its painful- But it produces something beautiful. Its better for all of us in the long run...but requires making difficult choices in the short run. Don’t lose that idea amongst the addictive distraction.

TRANSITION:

And now- ladies and gentleman- words that speak directly to this incredibly sad situation we find ourselves in as a people. The words of the artist, who created another artist named Paul through suffering- who now- under the influence of the Holy Spirit- tells us about the beauty that is coming from his artistry. The redemption and the glory of New Creation.

Romans 8:18-30

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God’s sons to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility — not willingly, but because of him who subjected it — in the hope 21 that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage to decay into the glorious freedom of God’s children. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now. 23 Not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the firstfruits — we also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24 Now in this hope we were saved, but hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees? 25 Now if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience.

26 In the same way the Spirit also helps us in our weakness, because we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with inexpressible groanings. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because he intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

28 We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. 30 And those he predestined, he also

called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified.

1) The Artist is using all our suffering to make us beautiful in a beautiful world.

I remember watching Bob Ross paint on his PBS show when I was a kid. Now- Bob Ross is certainly not the apex of painting by any stretch- but- it was one of the few ways as a child I got to actually observe an artist go from a blank canvas to a finished work.

He always painted nature scenes- and when he would start I would watch with wonder at exactly what those first brush strokes were going to turn into. Would these be clouds, an ocean wave, a mountain? Slowly- the strokes would turn into the landscape and my little 8 year old eyes could finally see something beautiful developing.

And then- he would ruin the painting. I would think the thing was finished. And he'd just take this deep, dark, black color and make a HUGE line right down the middle of the scene.

The first time I saw him do this- I was a little angry. Why would you do such a thing? The painting was great!

Then he would take his brush- and start to pull the paint away from that line- on the left and the right- and right before my eyes- a happy little tree- that gave depth to the scene- and actually made it more real- and ultimately- more beautiful.

That's what Paul is saying that God does with evil- and with our suffering.

v 18 & 20

He says "I consider that the big dark line down the middle of painting- is all going to be worth the end result.

He subjected all of his creation- to futility. In other words- it seemed like everything he made up this point- was pointless- because of suffering- but actually- the master artist was at work taking the paint and drawing it out into a tree that gives depth, meaning and beauty.

v 28-29

He says "all things" work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose.

First- this statement does not mean that...

1- you will always know or understand HOW God is working for good...

2- it does not mean that your job is to constantly justify or protect God by explaining to people that they should look for some silver lining in the middle of suffering. One of the worst ways to use this text is to look at someone grieving in deep suffering or loss and say- "Hey- don't be so down- God's gonna use this for good."

That is way more like distraction than it is a good application of this text. These verses talk about a deep groaning in response to suffering is where the Holy Spirit meets us. The aim of this verse is not to be happy in the midst of pain and grief.

While it is absolutely true that God uses all suffering to make us into something beautiful- he does not promise that we will understand how he does it- nor does he task us to figure it out. But he does call us to mourning and groaning. More on that in a bit.

That said- the point is well taken here that the brush stroke of suffering is going to make us more like Jesus, and bring us into a deep appreciation of the final piece of art. The New Creation that God is making us- and making the world into.

The good that all things are working together to produce is not about giving you better circumstances- its about making you like Jesus-

Every painful chapter in your story- God will use to conform you to the image of his son.

God's work is often compared to a tapestry. Where if you look at the artist weaving it on the back side- it looks unimpressive- chaotic even. But when you look on the other side- you can see the way every thread was pulled tight to create a beautiful image.

You can't judge a tapestries beauty- until you get to the otherside.

Likewise- we won't feel or understand all the ways God used the painful parts of our life to bring about ultimate beauty in us.

Its also extremely important to see here- that Paul writes All Things work together for Good for those who LOVE GOD and are CALLED according to his purpose.

That doesn't mean that if you love God- then he makes your suffering worth it. It means that if you choose to love yourself- he allows you to walk away from the good he is working. IF you don't trust he is working through your pain- you will never walk around to the other side of tapestry to behold and participate in the beauty.

You'll walk away claiming he doesn't know what he's doing. You'll cut off Bob Ross as soon as the deep dark stroke goes down the middle of the painting- claiming he's a hack who has no clue how to paint.

If you don't trust him, stay with him, follow his calling to see what he's doing in you and for you- you won't participate in the redemption of your suffering.

Back to 1)

But he's not just doing something to our character or our spirit. He's making all THINGS new.

All of creation- including our bodies.

v 22-23

I won't stay here long, because we covered these verses last week- but I don't want to leave out this wonderful hope.

God isn't just preparing some disembodied heaven for us. He's making all creation new. The Scripture calls it New Heavens and New Earth. also New Creation.

Heaven is not a final destination. For those that love God and are called according to his purpose- your final destination is here. Right where we're standing. A purified, renewed remade Murfreesboro TN. On Earth as it is in heaven.

And you will have a completed whole body. Where in a world broken by our sin- we decay, and move toward disintegration...in New Creation all things will be renewed and continually moving toward INTEGRATION- the Hebrew word in the OT is SHALOM- translated Peace- but it's the peace of INTEGRATION- all things working together for Good. All things working together as they should. No longer will there be struggle human vs God, Human vs Human or Creation vs Human- Which, BTW- are all the major storylines in the films you watch and the books you read. Now- all things will interact and produce beauty and flourishing as God intended. Forever.

That is the eternal finished painting.

Transition: But- we don't get there, Paul says- before we groan together. And therein comes our warning.

2) If we're addicted to distraction- we'll miss the deepest & sweetest brushstrokes of the Holy Spirit.

Paul brings up groaning twice from v 22- 23

He says that creation Groans with labor pains...like a pregnant woman about to give birth to a baby...and then he says that those who have put their faith in Christ- who

have the Holy Spirit reminding us of the truth about our identity and our future and the way that God loves us as a father- he was that WE GROAN with creation.

That greek word for GROAN- also means to sigh. Which can also be helpful. When we sigh- we are recognizing that something is not like it should be- and we are instinctively taking a deep breath- pulling in oxygen in an attempt to draw strength to make it through the moment when things are painful- or not like we want them to be- to get through to the other side.

Like a woman working through the pain of childbirth to get to that beautiful baby! She groans- she intentionally adjusts her breathing. She sighs.

So- Paul says creation- or the world is groaning- and people who know Jesus- are groaning- taking deep labored breaths because we want to Jesus to come back and finish this painting.

v 26-27

Then Paul also writes that the Holy Spirit- the third person of the one trinitarian God- helps us in our weakness by INTERCEDING for us with unspeakable groans.

There are a couple of things here.

First- emotion.

God is feeling our pain. Think of that beautiful verse in John 11- at the tomb of his friend Lazarus- even though Jesus knows he will resurrect Lazarus- he deeply feels his friend's death and the pain of Mary and Martha- Lazarus' sisters. so- Jesus wept.

And listen- Suffering is not a competitive sport. Jesus weeps- the Holy Spirit groans at all of our pain. Everything that is not right about the world- grieves Jesus. So while yes, a paper cut is different from the Holocaust- not even on the same level- we shouldn't compare suffering and shame one another because our suffering isn't as great as someone else's. That can actually lead people to ignore grief and pain, instead of going through the process of groaning and letting the Holy Spirit minister to them.

The second thing about this groaning is wisdom- the groaning represents emotion and wisdom.

Paul writes the the Spirit intercedes- or talks to God the Father on our behalf- according to our Father's will.

This means that as we go through grief and pain and endure suffering and recognize it and mourn it and ask questions like the Psalmist asks- Why GOD? and Where are you GOD?- that the Holy Spirit is- in some way I can't explain- taking those groanings and turning them into prayers asking for the Father to complete the work he is doing.

In your moment of pain- when you can't even get out the words to ask God- the Holy Spirit himself feels you- and talks to the Father for you with wisdom.

There is in our darkest moments- and intertrinitarian conversation happening within the Godhead- about how they will turn your pain- into beauty in you- and around you.

BTW- You know another famous intertrinitarian conversation? Genesis 1. "Let us make man in our image." When God gets beautifully creative- he talks to himself.

That is how he made original creation- and that is how is making NEW CREATION.

So now- lets think back to Ted Gioia's article.

Dopamine Loop Pic

If my life is being swallowed up by addiction to distraction...

That is always seeking escape from grief, mourning, groaning, thinking,...all for short dopamine bursts that simply give me temporary pleasure...where in this loop will I join with creation and the Holy Spirit in groaning for the redemption of my body...for the King to come back and make all things new. Where will I cry out Abba, Father...and Jesus come quickly!?

I won't. I won't.

I won't join in with the Holy Spirit. And I will never desire to look on the other side of the tapestry. I'll miss the Father's calling me according to his purpose- and I will drain all the meaning out of my suffering. Just to see the next 10 second video in my feed...and the next one, and the next one and the next one.

And sure- it will dull the pain. Sure- it won't hurt as bad. But my growth in Christ will be stunted- and I won't have the patience wait for anything with hope. I won't have the patience to know God by deeply engaging his word. I won't have the patience to pray or to be silent and listen. I won't have the patience for anything other than quick fixes and addictive thin hot takes.

Addiction- Distraction- Entrainment- Art pic

If Go's work in the world is art. If I am a part of his masterpiece. If beauty comes through suffering- not through avoiding suffering- and this is the state of our culture... well- just take a look at what happening in our hearts and minds to what God is doing in the world. ITs being eaten by Tik Toks.

Transition: So is there hope? Yes. Do you think Apple Vision Pro can stop the Lord our God? Or AI or Chat GPT or Tik Tok? No.

3) What the Artist started — He will finish.

The musical artist Lecrae has this line in his song 8:28- that's based on Romans 8:28. The chorus goes like this.

It's gon' all work out, sooner than later
You don't have to worry bout tomorrow
It's gon' work out in your favor
Just keep your head to the sky
Keep your eyes on the prize

There's a line in that song that has stuck with me, not only because of the artistry of the sound in the rap...but because it's the message of hope in Romans 8

The master artist makes your mess a masterpiece regardless- Lecrae "8:28"

v 29-30

Paul doesn't bring up this word to start an argument about Calvinism. In the middle of uncertainty- he's bringing comfort.

That's why he goes on to make this chain. What God the artist decided to do- he is going to bring to completion. It started with his choice to make all things new...and it will end with Glorification- all things new.

God didn't choose to love you because of your righteousness. And if he didn't choose you because of your good works- he's not going to drop you because of your bad ones.

He's going to finish the painting.

And do you know how we know this?

Because the cross of Jesus is the Bob Ross tree that went right down the middle of the painting. Everyone thought that at Jesus' death- everything was ruined. But God kept painting. He kept pulling out those happy little branches into the resurrection of Jesus.

v 23

Paul refers both to Jesus' resurrection- and here in v 23- to the Holy Spirit given to us as a "firstfruits".

When a harvest is coming- the first fruits are the early bloomers. The first apple or cherry, or olive or grape picked off the branch. The others aren't quite ready yet, but

the first fruits- if they are sweet and plentiful- give the farmer an idea of what he can expect in his crop.

Our first fruits are JESUS' resurrection...and the Holy Spirit within us- testifying to us that God is our father, that he loves us, that our future with him is secure. that sin doesn't own us and death can't stop us.

Which means that the harvest to come. the other side of the tapestry. The final picture...will be completed...and thorough the pain...not despite pain....but through the painful brushstrokes.

The master artist makes your mess a masterpiece regardless- Lecrae "8:28"