

Nothing can separate

By [Ryan Dueck](#)

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I've been thinking often over the last few days and weeks about the last three verses of the magnificent eighth chapter of Paul's letter to the church in Rome:

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 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.

So much of life is a gradual (or painfully, wrenchingly abrupt) process of being separated from things. We are separated from the past, from experiences and relationships that form us as people. As time marches on, the memories fade or become cloudy, and we feel them slipping away. I have a general recollection of what it was like to be the father of four-year-old twins—of the delights and heartaches peculiar to *that particular stage* of my life and theirs, but the specifics are growing increasingly difficult to recall. My relationship with nearly 14 year olds is of a different character and quality to that earlier stage of my life—a stage of life that I am increasingly feeling separated from. This is true for all of us, I suspect. We are, in many ways, products of our pasts, yet the past is always slipping away.

We are separated from the future. We don't know what it will hold, don't know how we will respond to the things it will contain. How will we cope with the difficulties that loom on the horizon? Will we be strong enough? Will we be the people that we want to be, the people that those around us need us to be? We see life take its toll on our friends, our families, our neighbors. We know that we are powerless to secure the things that matter most to us. We want to believe in a hopeful future, but we look around and it seems far from certain. We wonder if faith and hope will be strong and sure enough for what looms on the horizon.

We are increasingly separated from our bodies and our competencies. To grow older is to lose the ability to do things that we once did, or to do them *differently* than we once did. We know that our bodies will one day betray us, that our minds will one day not be as sharp as we are pleased to imagine they are now. We know that our motivations and inclinations will morph and grow and decline and fade. We know that nothing stays the same and that while there are undoubtedly gains as things change, there are also significant losses.

We are separated from those we love. All of us know or *will* know what it means to have those close to us die. This is the final separation, the one that often hurts the very most. But there are smaller deaths, smaller separations along the way. Relationships die or wither away into small and selfish shells of what they once were. Illness and chronic pain steal the people we love away from us, replacing them with people we barely recognize, people we struggle to love.

And, of course, there is the threat of separation produced by the suffering and pain of those we dearly love—a separation that threatens to finally break us. We have our well-rehearsed words about the meaning of pain, of how God is present in the pain, about how God will redeem the pain, etc. And then suffering actually comes—it leaps from the sterile pages of books and articles and takes up residence in our lives. And we stagger and groan, groping around in the dark, searching for the God, clinging to hopes that seemed so sure in the light, but that now seem impotent and distant in the midst of dark valleys.

Yes, to be human is to live in the shadows of separation from the best and the deepest parts of who we are, who and how we love, and what we ultimately hope for. The things we most want fly by the window as the train speeds by. Nothing sticks, nothing lasts. Everything fades away, including us.

The powerful hope of Romans 8 is that even in the midst of all these separations, there is *nothing* that can finally separate us from the love of God. Nothing. Not *one* of the separations whose dark clouds we daily live under can pose a final threat to the love of God, in Christ Jesus our Lord. There is a thread that weaves its way through all of our losses, all of our separations, and the thread looks like love. This is a truly *astounding* hope!

It can sound really trite to say that love is bigger than all that life threatens to steal. But what if it were true? What if it were *really true* that the final word upon all of our

stories, with all their separations, was the most powerful and determined love imaginable? What if it were true that nothing—*nothing!*—can separate us from the love of all loves, the light of all lights, the One who gave himself away, binding himself to us and us to him, and ensuring that the final word for those whose hope is in this One is not separation but unity and embrace?

If it were true—and if those of us who live with this conviction and hope internalized this into the very core of our beings—then we might just be “more than conquerors” (Rom. 8:37). Not because we are particularly strong or stoic, not because separations don’t hurt like hell, not because doubts don’t arise, and certainly not because our beliefs allow us to skate cheerily across the surface of pain, but because—and *only* because—the one who loved us has already conquered, and because he holds out his wounded hands to welcome us, to guide us, to prop us up when failing, and to carry us, if necessary, into the future he has prepared.

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