Patience and Hope.

This lesson is about patience and hope, and it draws inspiration from Paul's statement in Romans 8:18-25. Here Paul describes three states of the present earthly creation.

1. A longing to be rescued from the tyranny of transience and decay. "The earnest longing of the creation waits expectantly for the revealing of the sons of God" (Rom 8:19).

2. A sense of futility and disappointment. "The creation was subjected to vanity... the bondage of corruption" (Rom 8:20-21).

3. A blindness to the reality beyond. "In hope we have been saved, but there is no such thing as hoping for what you already see... we hope for what we do not see" (Rom 8:23-25).

Our Deepest Longing

If you are like most people, you are aware of a vague but very strong longing deep in your heart. You may not be able to quite put your finger on what you are longing for.

Maybe you have pursued love, or adventure, or bodily perfection, or wealth, or service to the poor, or drugs, or something else, in an effort to satisfy the longing, but it's still there. I believe this innate longing is for fellowship with God in the eternal heaven.

Paul recognises that "the earnest longing of the creation waits expectantly for the revealing of the sons of God" and he went on to write of "the hope that the creation itself will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom 8:19-21).

It is only natural that we long for that glory — even if we don't know about it or believe. We have a longing for it, because it is our intended destiny.

It's also natural, of course, to feel that Jesus is a long time coming. Mind you, he himself does not think so. The last statement he made in the Bible was, "Behold I am coming quickly" (Rev 22:20).

Nevertheless, even if we realise the short span of our lives, we can still feel that is a long time, and become impatient in our longing and hope.

We must be more at peace, and be prepared, if I may play on words, to "long long". As James says, "Be patient therefore brethren, until the coming of the Lord" (Jas 5:7).

The Futility of Life

If you are like most people, you are disappointed by life in this world. Sure it has its good times, even its ecstatic moments. But what if you take the sum of your life, leaving out of the picture God, faith, and the hope of heaven, what do you have?

Your kids? Well that's good, but many people have lost their kids. Your job? Well that's good, but many people don't have a job or the one they've got they hate. Your health? Well that's good, but many people don't have health but pain and disability.

I could go on mentioning other good things, but the fact remains that they can all be taken from you as they were from Job (Job 1-2). Even if they are not, when you add them all up they fall far short of expectations, as in the case of king Solomon who wrote, "Futility of futilities says the preacher, all is futility...and striving after the wind" (Ecc 1:2, 2:4-11). His son David wrote, "Surely every man is at best a mere breath, surely every man walks about as a phantom" (Psa 39:5-6).

Our hope of heaven is different. There is no futility in heaven, and our "hope does not disappoint" (Rom 5:5). Paul tells us that "The creation was subjected to futility, not voluntarily, but because of him who subjected it in hope... of the glory of God" (Rom 8:20-21).

I think Paul means that we should not become exasperated with the futility, disappointments, and frustrations of life on earth, because God subjects this world to futility in order that we may rest our hope in his plan for us. He imparts futility to this world to direct our attention to His plan. God's plan teaches us that this life is not an end in itself, but a journey with Christ along a narrow road to a heavenly and eternal city (Mtt 7:13-14, Php 3:20, Heb 11:13,16).

We must be more accepting of the disappointments and dissatisfactions of life, and be patient in our hope for that joyous world where everything makes sense and, if I may play on words again, a world where there are no "vanishing vanities". We can take a lesson from the Thessalonians whom Paul congratulated for their, "patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ..." (1Th 1:2-3).