

What the Holy Spirit Prays For You...

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[0 : 0 0] Our Bible reading this morning is from Romans chapter 8, starting at verse 18. It's on page 1135 in the Church Bibles.

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning, as in the pains of childbirth, right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we eagerly await for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is not hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?

[1 : 1 9] But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

And those he predestined, he also called. And those he called, he also justified. And those he justified, he also glorified. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to you. Thanks, Tracy, for reading. If you could keep your Bibles open at Romans chapter 8, that would be a big help as we look at that together.

[2 : 3 4] It's page 1135 in the church Bibles. And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet if you'd find that helpful to see where we're going as we look at that together.

Let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray together. Father God, we thank you that you have made yourself known to us as you've spoken to us in your word about your Son, the Lord Jesus.

We pray that as you speak to us now, you'll give us hearts that can understand your word and hearts that are willing to change and follow you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Well, the passage this morning starts with a claim that some of us could find pretty outrageous. Verse 18, I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Some of us might find this outrageous for a surprising reason. That is the danger that we've been infected by, what's sometimes called the prosperity gospel. It's a distortion of the Christian message that's not hard to find in Glasgow or on the internet, all across the world really in churches, where the Christian message promises some kind of combination of health and wealth and happiness in this life that goes beyond what God promises to us in his word.

[4 : 08] So it takes some of God's promises for the future especially and draws them into the present so that it pulls expectations we should have for the future into the present life.

So a prosperity gospel preacher might say, the only thing stopping you from encountering healing in a situation you're in and good health is your own lack of faith.

God stands willing to heal you now, but it's just your faith that's the barrier. And it's attractive, that kind of teaching. Of course it's attractive. It's very deceptive.

It's actually quite hard to spot. And it's a shocking lie to hear that. Romans 8, we have a very clear expectation from Paul that the present life for a Christian is one where there's suffering.

Our present sufferings, he says, verse 18. In fact, we have to accept that as a Christian, though God can heal you today, and I believe God does heal people today, nonetheless, as a Christian, anything that could happen to anyone in the world could happen to you.

[5 : 16] And things are actually worse than that. Because if you look at verse 17, the verse above that we finished with last week, Paul says about us being adopted into God's family, if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.

If indeed, we share in his sufferings, in order that we may also share in his glory. In other words, for a Christian, we can expect life to be harder than if we were not a Christian.

We've seen since chapter 5 of Romans, this key understanding of the Christian life, that you're in a faith union with Jesus Christ. You're united to him, so that everything that happens to him happens to us, if you're a Christian.

And that's wonderful news, because it means that we are adopted into God's family. We've got the hope of a future eternity with God forever, in a place where there's no more pain and death.

And God looks on us now as justified, because we're in Christ. But that also means that we're united with Jesus in his suffering. For Jesus, there was a life of obedient suffering before he entered into glory.

[6 : 25] And Paul uses the language here, in verse 17, of us sharing in his sufferings. I don't know what you think about that. I think that's quite a surprising phrase. We're used to thinking of Jesus' suffering as sufficient on its own.

Jesus did everything that was needed when he died on the cross. It was sufficient. Why do we need to share in his sufferings? There's a really intriguing verse in Colossians 2, where Paul says, I fill up in myself what was lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions.

It's extraordinary. What was lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions? He died on the cross to pay our ransom. Well, as God's people, I think the answer to that is Jesus has given us work to do, the great commission, that we might go and faithfully proclaim Christ to the nations.

And as we live obediently, faithfully, as we speak of Jesus, that's going to involve suffering to make Christ known. And that's that sharing in the sufferings of Christ.

That's the filling up what's lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions as we speak of his suffering and his glory to the world and people persecute us for that.

[7 : 39] So our union with Christ is a picture of suffering now for glory later. And Paul himself lists in verse 35, we'll look at it in two weeks' time, verse 35, trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, and sword.

And we looked at this in the roots group, I mean, and people said it seems such a random list. And then you realize these are the things Paul listed in 2 Corinthians to describe his ministry. This is what it cost him to live for Jesus.

And we need to own that expectation for our lives. The problem is, lots of us are hoping that our Christian life will be marked by wealth, health, comfort, pleasure, leisure, friendship, popularity, happiness, and then we'll get to heaven when we die.

That's basically the dream. So we follow this crucified Savior, but we hope that he's done all the dying that's needed around here. And maybe we want to change the world as long as it doesn't cost us anything.

And Paul says, if indeed, verse 17, if indeed we share in his sufferings, that we might also enter his glory. He sees it as an inevitable aspect of the Christian life.

[8 : 57] So that's something that we might find extraordinary about verse 18. Outrageous. That there's a sobering expectation of suffering for the Christian.

But of course, there's another reason why many of us might read verse 18 and find it outrageous. It's because we might struggle to believe that anything could be so wonderful that Paul could look at the suffering that we have gone through or we are going through and say that is not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in you.

It's an outrageous claim, isn't it? We've got people in our church family who've been very badly sinned against in their lives. People who are bitterly disappointed. People who are grieving for lost husbands, lost parents, broken marriages, lost children, young adults with cancer and aggressive treatment.

I was just reading last week a book by this guy Cameron Cole, *Therefore I Have Hope*. And he starts the story. What formed the book was that he lost his three-year-old son.

His three-year-old son went to bed one night and just never woke up again. And how he dealt with that, the trauma of that as a Christian. How can God promise in his word that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us?

[10 : 24] And if you're here just visiting, looking in on the Christian faith, surely this is a great week to be here. Because whatever you believe about the world, about God, about yourself, about what's wrong with the world, about the answer, whatever your worldview is, you've got to ask the question of your worldview, how is this worldview going to help me in suffering in my life?

Because suffering is coming your way. You might be able to ignore it for a while and live as though you're immortal. That's kind of how I lived in my 20s, as though I was going to live forever.

But, you know, then you get to your early 30s and if it hasn't already hit you, suffering will come in your life. And you're left with the wreckage. And Paul here tells us four truths that are vital for Christians as we suffer today.

The first is, the whole of creation is rooting for us. We're not the only ones who are frustrated with the state of the world. Just look at verse 19.

For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

[11 : 46] So the whole of creation is frustrated. Maybe that's hard to believe if you live in Scotland. Maybe this is one of the hardest places to believe that. We've got the breathtaking scenery, haven't we?

We've got the highlands and the islands, the wildlife, the sky at night on a clear night. But God says to us, believe me, the whole cosmos is frustrated thanks to human sin.

God subjected the universe to frustration when we turned our backs on God. So we look at natural disasters, earthquakes, floods, mudslides, volcanic eruptions and we think, how could a good God make a world like this?

Well, what if the reason that that kind of thing is happening in our world is because creation is not in the condition it's meant to be? The whole thing is frustrated from what it was meant to be and what it will be when Jesus comes in glory to put the world right.

And the way Paul describes it here, it's as though creation knows that something is wrong. It feels that frustration. It's groaning in verse 22.

[12 : 55] In verse 20, it's in hope. It's hopeful. In verse 19, eagerly expecting the day when the children of God will be revealed. That's Christians brought into freedom and glory.

I don't know what you think about that, but I think that's extraordinary. Paul says, do you realize that the future that is coming is so unimaginably wonderful the whole of the universe is frustrated waiting for it for you?

C.S. Lewis wrote a book, *The Shadowlands*, and he describes in *The Shadowlands*, he describes this bus trip from people who are in hell to heaven.

Okay, so that's not going to happen. C.S. Lewis is just playing with the idea. There's a day trip, a coach trip, for people who are in hell to come to visit heaven. And what he says is, when they get off the coach, he describes them squealing in pain because the grass hurts their feet like blades of diamonds.

Why? Because it's real. Because it's so real and none of us have ever actually been in the real thing before. What he's saying is that we've fallen into the trap and we do this all the time.

[14 : 08] We think this world is the real thing and if we ever do think about heaven, about life after death, we basically think about things on the other side, something that's a bit less real.

We even describe it as on the other side, as though we're on the right side. And what we have to realize is we're on the other side now. It's the new creation that is real and we're living in the *Shadowlands*.

Here's C.S. Lewis. He says, It's an incredible thought, isn't it?

So we hear the most incredible music, you know, whatever your musical taste. If you just imagine thinking of the most beautiful, complex music you might hear, you might hear a Beethoven symphony or a Bach sonata.

And we don't realize that compared with what the new creation would be like, even the finest music you would hear today is like the orchestra tuning up before the curtain is raised.

[15 : 15] If you think about our senses, most of us have got five senses and we know, don't we, that to lose one would make a massive difference. So you get these amazing videos on YouTube of people who have been born deaf and they get cochlear implants and for the first time in their lives they can hear and it's amazing as you see them suddenly opened up to the sounds of our world, the sounds of loved ones and there are tears and it's wonderful.

But what if, just imagine if in the new creation we're going to have a thousand senses. So in ways that we just cannot even imagine the new creation will be the real thing and we'll look back and think, how did we even manage before?

The world is totally frustrated right now. And there's going to be a transformation that we can't even grasp. Every view of the mountains, every taste of malt whiskey, every ski slope, every moment of joy on a sports pitch, these are just echoes of eternity ringing through from a distant land to where we are now in the shadow lands.

Imagine what our future is going to be like if the whole creation is waiting for it. And we need to be better at living with our eyes fixed on that future hope.

That's our second truth from the passage. The hope of glory sustains us. Paul talks about creation groaning in verse 22 and then he describes our groaning in verse 23 if you have a look.

[16 : 42] Not only so, but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

Paul, right through this chapter, is weaving in the kind of, there's bits of the Christian life that are already with us and there's bits that we don't yet have. So, last week we finished on this amazing truth that if you're a Christian you are adopted into God's family in verse 15.

He said, you have received the Spirit that brought about your adoption to sonship. So we've been adopted if you're a Christian by God. We've got a new spiritual life.

But then here in verse 23 he says, we groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship. So there's an already to our adoption but we long for it to be finally made complete as we know God intimately as our Father and we have redeemed bodies that are put right and we don't sin anymore.

So Paul calls our experience of the Spirit today the first fruits of the Spirit. That is that it's the real thing but it's not the whole thing. The Spirit assures us in our hearts that we're forgiven, that we're loved, that we're God's children.

[18 : 01] He's given us new spiritual life already. He empowers us to live for Jesus to be more like Christ. But it's just the first fruits and the harvest is yet to come.

So we groan, we groan as we wait for the future that's coming. And isn't it helpful to see that in the Bible that as a Christian it's okay to groan.

We don't grumble, we don't grumble and look back at the past and say, oh, things used to be so much better. We don't grumble as we look at other people and think, oh, I wish I had what they had. But we groan looking ahead to the future as we yearn for what things will be.

We groan about our own sin. We long for the day that's coming when we'll never sin again. Look at our sin in our lives and groan about it.

What a phrase, verse 21, that we'll be liberated and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. The glory of God is his brilliance.

[19 : 03] And if we let him, he will transform us so that we reflect that brilliance forever. We'll be like mirrors reflecting that brilliance. The risen Jesus is going to come back and we're going to be hit with, it'll be like being hit with a bomb of glory that transforms us into Jesus likeness.

And so Paul describes the creation groaning in verse 22 as in the pains of childbirth. And this was the days before gas and air, before epidurals.

A woman's groans in childbirth sound like somebody dying. Believe me. When our second baby was born, Kathy's not in the room, I did ask her if I could share this. When our second baby was born, the labor started and so we went to hospital and I was feeling pretty smart because I'd found a contraction timer app on my phone.

Kathy wasn't thrilled with the app but I was because it had statistics, it drew graphs for you, you know, during the labor, you know, you could look at how things were progressing. Anyway, the contractions, they weren't really getting any more often and more frequent.

So we got sent home in the early hours of the morning and something must have happened in the car journey on the way home that meant that Bethany decided it was really time to emerge.

[20 : 25] So we got out the car at home and we're in the house and Kathy was in proper pain and it was pretty awful but we were a bit embarrassed to go straight back in because we'd just been sent home.

So then it got to the point where we thought, no, this really is actually happening and I couldn't drive because I had epilepsy which I've told you about before so I couldn't drive so we call a cab and we get in this cab it's now about 2am the taxi driver, I've never seen anybody go that quickly it was extraordinary straight through the red lights whizzing past speed cameras and he was determined the baby would not come out in his car and we got out to the labor ward which we'd just come from and we got into the lift and it was really noisy let me assure you it was very noisy so noisy that when the lift doors opened the midwives were there waiting they'd heard the noise in the lift okay and they came out to grab Kathy she was put on this bed wheeled into a place and Bethany was out in no time it was pretty full on okay obviously especially for me you know sympathy okay anyway anyway the noise the noise in that lift right it sounded like death but it was the sound of new life coming and that's Paul's illustration for creation groaning today it sounds like death but it's new life is on the way and if we can trust that hope it sustains us now as we groan fundamentally as Christians we are awaiting people we see that in verse 24 if you have a look verse 24

Paul's so determined to see that we're waiting for in this hope we were saved but hope that is seen is no hope at all who hopes for what they already have but if we hope for what we do not yet have we wait for it patiently so let me ask you how much of your time do you spend thinking about your future hope as a Christian think of the difference it would make if we thought about it every day intentionally just imagine two poor old women and each of them has a purse and in each purse there's three pounds and for each woman that's all she's got left in the whole world and then one of them gets a telephone call to say their close friend has died and left them a hundred million pounds and they're going to receive it in a few days in their bank account and both women go into town and their purses with three pounds in them each get stolen how do the women react one of them is totally devastated isn't she that's all she had left and it was taken from her the other one thinks oh well never mind

I'm looking forward to that hundred million pounds arriving in two days time what's the point it's a silly story but the point is what you what you know will happen to you in the future radically affects how you interpret what's going on now in your life and so folks it takes discipline to think about the future lots of us are so busy with the day to day but it's that hope that sustains us in the present but sometimes even with that hope we are completely knocked sideways by what's going on in life and it's so confusing we don't even know what to pray for and for that we have the third wonderful truth in the passage the prayers of the spirit help us we heard that creation is groaning and we're groaning but now here we hear that God groans as well look at verse 26 in the same way the spirit helps us in our weakness we do not know what we ought to pray for but the spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans so where we don't know what to pray for the spirit knows exactly what to pray for that's the point of verse 27 he says that the spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God

God knows God searches our hearts and he knows the mind of the spirit so the spirit and the father are together this is very precious isn't it I was talking to someone last week who said about the situation they're in we don't know what we should be praying for anymore here we're promised the spirit knows and he's praying for us right now right in line with God's will what is it that the spirit is praying what is God's will he tells us in verse 28 and we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him who have been called according to his purpose the spirit's right there praying with wordless groans to God the father who knows the spirit's mind that God will act for our good if we love him and what is that what is it that's our good verse 29 tells us for those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters so God is at work for our ultimate good in all things our ultimate good being that we would be made more like Jesus so the spirit prays with a greater concern for our holiness than our happiness he prays for our character more than he prays for our comfort and we're seeing here how he works sometimes you feel like you're just sailing surfing through life don't you just riding the waves everything's going well other times you feel like you're drowning but when we're struck down when we're lost for words the spirit is interceding with wordless groans and they mean something like this well father you can see Martin as well as I can you can see his heart what a complete mess he still is that's why he's reacting like this but father you chose him before the foundation of the world our plan for him is that he'll be more like Jesus Christ so be patient with him have mercy and change him make him more holy through what he's going through and the great thing about knowing God is praying for us is that God can do whatever he wants so that's our fourth point we've heard the whole of creation rooting for us the hope of glory sustains us the prayers of the spirit help us and fourthly the will of God guarantees us so we've got that verse 28

[27 : 23] God is big enough to work through suffering for our good one of the most common mistakes that Christians make in suffering is to say God wasn't in control that's why this awful thing happened God was not in control we say it because we don't want to doubt God's goodness but it leaves us with a small God the truth is that when you suffer it's never because God's hands are tied it's never because God took his eyes off the road it's never because God is weak if we turn towards God he is big enough to work through all things for our good to make us like Christ so that verse 30 is like a chain a chain you can't break four things you can't separate those he predestined he also called those he called he also justified those he justified he also glorified if you're a Christian then it's because God foreknew you it means he looked ahead

I mean in one sense he foreknew everyone but he looked ahead before creation and he appointed you to know him he predestined you he chose you to be one of his people then he called you that is that when you heard the gospel call that goes out to everyone repent and believe he was at work in your heart so that you would accept it and he justified you when Jesus paid for your sins past, present and future at the cross but the tense of verse 30 says we've also been glorified already as well in other words your future glory is as certain as if it's already happened no amount of suffering in this life can take it away so how does your world view equip you to handle suffering when it comes in your life Romans 8 gives us truth for everyone who puts their trust in Jesus that God has placed you in a union with Christ that means your suffering is a sharing with him on a path that led him to glory and will lead you to glory that future glory is so heavy it's so magnificent the whole of creation has pinned its hopes on it on the freedom and glory of the children of God it means that our greatest joys are just echoes they're just the orchestra tuning up for the big thing to start it means the deepest groans of our world today are like labour pains they sound like death but there's new life coming and while we wait

God in his goodness is at work his spirit is praying for his will to be done for our good to be done that we would be made more like Christ and if God is that big if God is that big the only question you've got left is is he good?

do I really trust him? and for that next time Paul points us to the cross it's we look at the cross and we see a God who has earned the right to be trusted verse 32 God does not spare his own son but gives him up for you kind of God like the story of when God told Abraham to go up the mountain and sacrifice Isaac and he provides the ram eventually in his place but he says now I know that you love me because you wouldn't spare your son your only son from me and we look at the cross and we can say to God now I know you love me because you didn't spare your son your only son for me let's pray together just a moment of quiet to reflect on God's word to us heavenly father heavenly father thank you that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us lord jesus we pray that you will come soon heavenly father when jesus comes would he find us watching and waiting forgive us for being preoccupied with the present and taking our eyes off the future that sustains us holy spirit thank you that you groan for us in our weakness would you work through our lives to make us more like the sun and grow in us our trust that you finish what you start we pray these things gracious god in jesus name amen