

Groaning but Hopeful

Romans 8:18-27

Listen again to verses 23-25

“And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as **we wait eagerly** for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, **we wait for it with patience.**” Romans 8:23-25

We wait for it eagerly. We wait for it with patience.

Does anyone here ENJOY WAITING? Is anyone a professional at patience? Let's test that. I will speak again in 30 seconds...

Did that test your patience? 30 seconds of silence... Now, why didn't you get up and leave? Why didn't you get distracted and start chatting with your neighbor? Ah, you had a key piece of information, didn't you? I told you I would speak again in 30 seconds. So that gave you hope and a clear expectation. You might have been a little bit skeptical on the exact timing depending on how well you know me, but you (hopefully) trusted that I would follow through on what I said.

The exhortation of this part of Romans 8 is to **WAIT with patience, endurance and hope**. Verse 23 says we are waiting for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. Those are powerful promises to think about so we wait for them eagerly! Verse 24 tells us that we are waiting for something we cannot yet see - which is why we must wait with hope and faith. And verse 25 adds on the need for patience.

While we wait for the restoration of the world and the glorification of our bodies, we groan. Verse 22 says ***the whole world is groaning as in the pains of childbirth***. Something good and joyful is coming at the end of history, but it is a painful process to get there - like childbirth.

Now, I was a small baby, 6.5 pounds; and I was nearly born en route to the hospital. So my mom did not have a long labor with me. But then I tried to back into the world, so she did have her share of pain in the delivery process.

Our boys opted for long labors. Caleb wins the prize with over 30 hours of active labor. Seth and Joel win the prizes for emergency C-sections after 14 and 15 hours respectively. Micah wins the prize for being a scheduled C. The point is that labor is painful - and I know because we experienced it together. (Ok, I don't actually know and what I do know is that men could not handle having babies and God knew that. So in our house we don't say "take it like a man," we say, "take it like a mom.")

Labor is painful, but when it's over, assuming everything goes well, you have a baby and the happiness of holding that child greatly overshadows the pain of getting to that point. Here in Romans 8 Paul compares the groaning of the world and the groaning of the believer to labor pains. In this world we will have trouble. The world is broken, darkened by sin and the effects of the fall. But when it's all over, God is going to restore everything - He is going to deliver us and all

of creation into an eternity so joyful and a glory so wonderful that we will consider everything we are going through now to be “light and momentary afflictions” by comparison.

For now, in the midst of the labor pains, we all feel the brokenness and fallenness of the world in different ways.

Many in the Oakwood family have recently experienced

- **Disease:** Illness, weakness and pain in our bodies;
- **Death** of loved ones.
- **Disasters** like the hurricane we all went through last fall. We hear about earthquakes, wildfires, tornadoes, tsunamis, famines and diseases in other parts of the world.
- We all experience the **reigning sin** in the lives of people around us – from minor run-ins with co-workers and neighbors to full scale evil, violence, war, slavery, injustice, poverty and oppression.
- And we all struggle with the **remaining sin** in our own hearts and in those we love – resulting in conflict, division, frustration, weakness and failure.

So in a world that is groaning under the consequences of the fall we all groan and sometimes the pain feels unbearable, just like the pain of a woman in labor. So **how can we wait on the Lord for the deliverance that is coming?** Paul gives us four answers: four ways we are called to wait. Four “Cs” today. We wait with confidence, certainty, clarity and comfort.

First, look back at v. 16 to see how we **wait with confidence**.

How to wait on the Lord:

1. With Confidence: we are the children of God

“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...” Romans 8:16-17a

Sometimes when you go through hardship you can develop **the mistaken idea that God is punishing you or doesn't care about you**. That is the spirit of slavery, not the spirit of sonship. God is not a slave-driver. He is not a harsh master just waiting for you to step out of line so He can zap you. God is a loving Father who has prepared an amazing eternal inheritance for all of us!

So as we wait for the restoration of all things, we wait with the confidence of kids who know their Papa. The Holy Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit - giving us that blessed assurance that Jesus is ours and we are His. The Holy Spirit not only gives us the assurance that we belong to Jesus but He also encourages us with the promise of our coming inheritance.

We are not just children of God - we are princes and princesses in His Kingdom. We are royalty and God has prepared a Kingdom for us to enjoy forever and forever!

Brothers and sisters - we groan in this world, longing to receive our new body upgrades. We groan in this world, grieving over disease, disasters, death and sin. We groan but we do not FEAR. **Slaves live in fear of punishment. Orphans live in fear of abandonment.** We are neither slaves nor orphans. We are God's children. So we can wait on our Papa, confident that He is in control, and that He has good plans for us.

Do you feel the assurance of a child of God? Do you sometimes feel like a slave or a step-child or an orphan? Do you feel like an illegitimate child, like you don't belong in the family? Hear the gospel - God has paid the price for your adoption! You have the full rights of a son or daughter of the King! There are no second class Christians - we are all equal brothers and sisters. And we wait on Papa's timing with confidence.

Second, we wait with certainty.

How to wait on the Lord:

2. With Certainty: we know something better is coming

"Heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be *glorified with him*. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with *the glory that is to be revealed to us*." Romans 8:17b-18

Consider that word: glory. What is our future? Say it with me: GLORY. What is our future? [GLORY.] Think about that. You will be **glorified** with Christ. You will be. The suffering you're going through right now is not even worth mentioning in light of the glory that you will soon experience.

Brother, sister - your future is GLORY. Now don't hear me preaching some wacky prosperity gospel - this is not about you or me. The glory believers will experience is the glory of Jesus Christ. We will only be glorified **with Christ**. Any glory we experience is only because of Him and in Him. If you want to be your own god and run your own planet, go join the Mormons. If you want an island with 70 virgins, join the Muslims. (Bummer for women in both of those scenarios, btw.) Christians will be glorified WITH CHRIST and IN CHRIST.

Since we are in Christ there is no condemnation awaiting us - no guilt or shame - just glory. And we can wait for that moment when we will be glorified because **we know it's coming**. We don't wish it or hope it in some weak sense. We KNOW IT. Because Papa said it.

Our English word **"hope" is a weak word**. It pretty much means "eh," maybe, "hope so." Will you win that March Madness pool? Hope so. Will the Rays win the Pennant? Hope so. Will the Bucs win the Super Bowl? Doubtful. Will my friend get better from the cancer? Hope so. Will we turn our finances around next month? Hope so.

Do you see? Our word for hope is flimsy. It does not convey certainty. The Biblical word for hope does. To hope in the sense that verses 23-25 talk about it.

"And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as *we wait eagerly* for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, *we wait for it with patience*." Romans 8:23-25

We are waiting for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. In an important sense those are already accomplished realities. We HAVE BEEN adopted as sons and daughters of God - it's already done. Verse 15 said, "we have received the Spirit of adoption as sons." We have. Past tense. Done. Verse 16 says, "The Spirit bears witness... that we ARE the the children of God." We ARE. Present. Not future.

The same is true of our redemption. The price has already been paid for both our redemption and adoption. Jesus paid it all. Finished. Done. Past. Completed. Sufficient. Verse 2 - "the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ from the law of sin and death." You have been set free. Past tense. Done. Finished. You used to belong to sin - you were a slave to it. But Jesus paid your ransom and redeemed you out of that slavery. Those old chains are broken, the cell door has been ripped off its hinges. You are free!

That is the part of our salvation that is ALREADY accomplished in Christ. But in the full and final sense, ***we feel the NOT YET of our salvation***, don't we? And so "we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." We have been adopted - but we aren't home yet. We have been redeemed but we aren't totally rid of all sin in our hearts and lives.

But the day is coming when God's work of salvation will be complete in each one of us and in the entire universe - a day when ***we will be HOME***, when ***we will be WHOLE*** - totally free from all sin and temptation and pain and fear and guilt and shame and sadness and loss. That is when we will be GLORIFIED.

That is the hope in which we were saved. It is a hope in something invisible right now for it is still yet to come. But that does not make it uncertain. This is not a flimsy "hope so" kind of wish. Will I ever be able to dunk? Hope so. (I let that one go a long time ago.) No. This is a certainty based on our confidence in our heavenly Father. This is a conviction.

We don't wonder, we don't worry - we KNOW something better is coming!

And that something better is called GLORY. C.S. Lewis has written that if you saw yourself in your future glorified state you would be tempted to worship.

Our future is Glory!

"Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." 1 John 3:2-3

We will be LIKE HIM. Just the moment of seeing God will transform us to be like Him.

Our future is Glory!

"So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body." 1 Corinthians 15:42-44

Notice the basis for our certainty in 1 Corinthians 15 - the resurrection of Jesus Christ. His mortal body was raised imperishable, raised in glory and power. His natural body was glorified into a spiritual body that will last forever. That is what awaits us. We don't have to wonder or worry - we KNOW for certain that what awaits us is GLORY. Something better is coming.

Hold on to this truth in whatever storm you find yourself right now.

- Are you or a loved one battling some kind of illness? Something better is coming!
- Are you walking through the valley of the shadow of death? Have you lost someone recently? Something better is coming - when even death itself will be defeated!

- Are you struggling with the effects of our fallen world? Your house or car breaking down? Something better is coming! In the new heaven and new earth there will be no more tears or pain or broken things - everything will be brand new!
- Are you feeling the effects of sin in your heart or in someone close to you? Something so much better is coming. You will be free from sin and temptation and struggle FOREVER. Everyone you know who belongs to Jesus will share in that freedom FOREVER. For all of us who have trusted in Jesus, something better is coming.

This is not wishful thinking. It is a fact proven by Jesus' resurrection and backed by the unchangeable promise of God.

How to wait on the Lord:

2. With **Certainty**: we know something better is coming

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with *the glory that is to be revealed to us.*" Romans 8:18

- Battle temptation with the ***better promises*** of God's Word

This is how we wait. With confidence in our all-loving and all-powerful heavenly father and with certainty that He has better things in store for us. We WILL be glorified with Christ. His glory will be revealed to us and because of that it will fill us and shine through us!

Every temptation we face invites us to question God's Word and choose a lesser thing now instead of waiting for God's better promise later. Brothers and sisters, whatever has your attention and is calling out to you, offering life and happiness - God has promised us something SO MUCH BETTER. Why turn away to things that bring shame when we have been promised GLORY? Hold on to the better promises of God's Word and use those promises to fight the deceptive temptations that come against you.

Third, we wait on the Lord with clarity: we see the brokenness of this world. It doesn't surprise us.

How to wait on the Lord:

3. With **Clarity**: we see the brokenness of this world.

"For the creation was *subjected to futility...* in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its *bondage to corruption* and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." Romans 8:20-21

Lots of people wonder why the world is so messed up. Why is there cancer and hurricanes, school shootings and sex-trafficking? Why does a good God allow all of this evil and suffering? It's a question that many people struggle to answer. But Bible-believing Christians know the answer.

The world is so messed up because of one guy: **Adam**. His wife didn't help him out, but Romans 5 puts the responsibility right where it belongs: Adam. When Adam let his wife eat that fruit and then joined her in that rebellion against the clear law of God, the world broke. That moment in time is called The Fall.

Before The Fall, everything was very good - there was no disease, no death, no conflict, no disasters. Everything was shalom - harmonious, joyful, peaceful, wonderful.

After the Fall, everything was corrupted, twisted and broken - both in the world and in the hearts of people. This is why the world is so messed up: because Adam brought sin into the world through his flagrant rebellion against God. And every human since him has added their corruption to the pile - so now we all have a share in the answer to the "why is this world so messed up" question.

So as we wait for the better promises of God to be fulfilled - for the world to be restored and for us to be glorified - we can see very clearly why and how the world is broken. We are not confused about it and therefore we should not despair over it. We know full well what is going on. And we know that God has a plan that is actively using even the worst things to bring about good. We'll get to our verses of the month in two weeks. But look at them again:

"And we know that for those who love God **all things work together for good**, for those who are called **according to his purpose**. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined **to be conformed to the image of his Son**." Romans 8:28-29

God has a purpose in the pain and it is for our good. Hardship and suffering are conforming us into the image of Christ. Pain is God's chisel to chip away our traits that are like Adam and to fashion us to be more like Jesus. Pain, as it has been said, is the gift that nobody wants.

Or to quote C.S. Lewis again, "God whispers in our pleasure but he shouts in our pain." Now, I am not saying that in this life we will always see the reasons for suffering and evil. No doubt the families who lost kids and loved ones in the Parkland shootings are struggling to see any good that has come from their deaths - and many of them may never perceive any good to have come of it.

But for those who love God and are called according to His purpose, we KNOW that all things work together for good. Many of you know Tony Dungy - former Coach of the Bucs and then the Colts. I was floored to see him at one of our son, Micah's, basketball games. And I was even more stunned when I was able to sit and chat with him for 20 minutes at a practice the Tuesday after the Super Bowl.

Watch this two minute clip of Tony talking about how God has used the death of his son, James: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xvRs9L8dY6c> **[stop after 1:42]**

I think we can agree that losing a child is one of the most agonizing pains in this world. When children say good-bye to their parents and bury them that is hard enough. But when parents are forced to say good-bye to their children and bury them, it is horrific.

Yet, as Coach Dungy so eloquently points out - that is the very thing that God did for us! He "did not spare His own Son but gave him up for us all!" I doubt any of you here would give up the life of your child to save me. I'll give you credit that a few might give your own life for mine - maybe. But giving your child? Your only child? I don't see any volunteers.

But that is what God did. He sent Jesus to the cross for you and for me.

So when you struggle with evil and suffering, pain and injustice - remember the cross. Remember Jesus. Whatever pain you are feeling, God has felt it and more. And if God could turn that most

grievous of evils into the greatest of goods - our very salvation - can't we trust him with our little evils and hardships? He will bring good out of them. He is using them to make us more like Christ.

It is painful. But we are not confused or unclear about what is happening. We know that this life is short and hard. We know this world is broken and corrupted by sin and the curse. We wait for the restoration of all things with patience and endurance, even eagerness, because we have CLARITY about the world we live in. This is not our home. This place we see and these bodies we live in - are just temporary.

Something so much better is coming!

We wait with confidence in our Papa, with certainty in our future, with clarity about this world and finally, we wait with comfort: we feel the Spirit's presence with us.

How to wait on the Lord:

4. With **Comfort**: we feel the presence of the Holy Spirit

"Likewise **the Spirit helps us** in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but **the Spirit himself intercedes for us** with groanings too deep for words." Romans 8:26

Here is the third groaning in this passage. The world is groaning as in the pains of childbirth. We know a joyful delivery is coming, but that doesn't make the process any less painful. And so we, too, "groan inwardly as we await our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (v. 23). Then in v. 26 the Spirit joins us in the groaning.

He comes alongside us to help us - for He is the Comforter, the Helper. We don't know how to pray - we can't be sure what God's particular will might be for any given hardship or challenge. Will he heal this illness? Will he delay a loved one's death? Will God open a new door for employment? Will He provide for our financial need?

How to wait on the Lord:

4. With **Comfort**: we feel the presence of the Holy Spirit

"Likewise **the Spirit helps us** in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought." Romans 8:26

- We don't always know what God is doing, but we can always hold on to the truth: God is **with us** and He is **working** for our good (v. 28-30).

We can trust God to work in whatever situation we are in - He WILL work all things together for good. But **we cannot be sure what that particular good will be in a given situation**. Anyone who tells you different is selling something. "Life is pain, princess." Beware of charlatan preachers who promise guaranteed results: guaranteed healing, guaranteed wealth and prosperity. These are false teachings that are very common today but the clear teaching from Scripture is that "we do not know what to pray for as we ought."

We don't always know what God is doing, but **we can and must always hold on to the truth**. **God is with us**. He has promised that He will never leave us or forsake us. **God is at work**, even in the hardest suffering and the most painful losses. He does have a plan! We may be groaning in the pains of labor, but something good will come from all of this pain - **God will deliver!** And

these light and momentary afflictions are not even worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

But for now: we don't always know what God is doing or how we should pray. Does that mean we don't pray? Of course not! This verse exhorts us to pray! But we pray with the great comfort that while we don't know how things will work out, the Holy Spirit does and He graciously translates our prayers, interceding for us. "And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." (v. 27)

And so we wait with the comfort that God is with us. We feel His presence. And even when we don't feel anything in particular, or maybe we feel nothing but pain and anger and fear - we can still fall back on what we KNOW to be true. We can still hold on to the truth God has revealed in Scripture: that He is good, He is with us, He is working, He is bringing good from this, He is shaping us into the image of Christ, He will finish His work - we will be glorified, and this world will be restored!

Let's pray!

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit

that we are children of God,

17 and if children, then heirs—

heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ,

provided we suffer with him

in order that we may also be glorified with him.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time

are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

19 For the creation waits with eager longing

for the revealing of the sons of God.

20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it,

in hope 21 that the creation itself

will be set free

from its bondage to corruption

and obtain the freedom

of the glory of the children of God.

22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

23 And not only the creation,

but we ourselves,

who have the firstfruits of the Spirit,

groan inwardly as we wait eagerly

for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

24 For in this hope we were saved.

Now hope that is seen is not hope.

For who hopes for what he sees?

25 But if we hope for what we do not see,

we wait for it with patience.

26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

For we do not know what to pray for as we ought,
but the Spirit himself intercedes for us
with groanings too deep for words.

27 And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit,
because the Spirit intercedes for the saints
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