



I want to start by asking you a question: What is making you groan these days? Groan is not a word we use much anymore. To groan is to make a deep inarticulate sound in response to pain or despair. When someone groans, nothing good is ever happening. I had a large needle put into my ankle last week to drain some fluid and trust me, it made me groan! Loudly! As we look around our world, we see plenty of reasons to groan. From 2001 to 2015 Americans have witnessed at least one major tragedy every single year. Even if it didn't happen on U.S. soil, we saw it on our TV and computer screens. Each year our sensibilities were challenged and ultimately hardened.

In 2001 New York City was attacked as two planes flew into the World Trade Center leaving 3,000 dead. Soon after we engaged in a war in Afghanistan and after that, Iraq. Other parts of the world suffered genocide and civil war. In 2004 a tsunami in the Indian Ocean left over 230,000 dead. In 2005 Hurricane Katrina ravished New Orleans and 1,800 people died. In 2008 the financial markets collapsed. We've experienced various outbreaks of flu and disease. In 2010 a massive earthquake in Haiti left over 300,000 dead and the Gulf oil spill disaster ruined an ecosystem for months. In 2011 another tsunami in Japan quickly turned into a nuclear crisis. Year after year, here in the US, we've seen mass shootings like the one in Newtown, Connecticut. Most recently we are witnessing an incredible humanitarian crisis flooding out of Syria and into Europe.

If those events don't make you groan, then you might want to pinch yourself and make sure you're alive! National and world events are one thing, but for some of you, there are things going on in your personal life that's causing you to groan in anguish as well. I won't depress us with another long list of those possibilities. But, in the face of all the things that make us groan, how can we possibly face each day? How can a Christian, of all people, face each day with hope and joy in the midst a world full of brokenness and pain? In our text this morning Paul will describe how our groaning will eventually be turned into glory. Let's start by reading Romans 8:18,

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Life is Full of Groaning

Paul doesn't pretend life isn't hard. He tells us life is full of suffering. But our present suffering can't even come close with what's to come. The hope of future glory is greater than present

sufferings. Think of all the problems, concerns, worries, and pain you are going through. Paul says they pale in comparison to the glory that will be revealed in us. He is reminding us of our glorious future. If we really knew and believed where we are going and what will happen in the end, it will give us perspective and hope for our current problems.

What is this glory that will be revealed in us? Glory is the majesty and splendor of God. God is eternal, immortal and incorruptible. In the Bible, God's glory is displayed as unapproachable light or blazing fire. God's glory is his beauty, power and honor. If you are a follower of Jesus, that means you are being transformed into his glorious image right now and when Jesus returns, you'll be fully glorified. But, how do we get there? The path to glory is suffering. That's what he says.

I recently watched an incredible documentary about three mountain climbers attempting to ascend the mountain Meru in the Indian Himalayas. This mountain was considered unclimbable. I don't want to spoil the movie but let's just say there was lots of suffering long before any hint of glory. It dawned on me that mountain climbers could save tons of time, money and energy if they reached the summit in a helicopter, but their ultimate purpose is conquest, not efficiency. Sure, they want to reach a goal, but they want to do so the hard way by testing their character and resolve. They want the glory of the summit. For these extreme climbers intense suffering is the only way to glory. The same is true in the Christian life and there is no helicopter ride to the summit!

In verses 19-27 Paul lays out all the ways we are groaning for glory; creation groans, Christian's groan, and the Holy Spirit groans. First, creation groans. Look with me at verses 19-22,

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.

Creation Groans

Last weekend I went on a 10-mile hike with my high school friend on some trails in the hills of Berkeley. It was stunning. I almost

forgot we were in the Bay Area. Nature and everything in it is absolutely beautiful. But, creation groans! Since the Fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden (Gen. 3:17) nature has been subjected to death and decay. The ground now produces thorns and thistles. It's subject to frustration because of our sin and disobedience. Have you ever brushed up against a stinging nettle? It hurts! You can thank sin for that! Have you ever been stung by a bee? That hurts too; some people even die. Did you know that those things and many others are all effects of the Fall? God never intended creation to be that way. Revelation 21-22 describe how in the New Heavens and the New Earth, everything in creation will be as it was originally intended to be. The world is not going to hell in a hand basket; the world will be renewed and restored into its original state. There will be no animal predators. The lion will lie down with the lamb. Roses will lose all thorns. You'll never get poison ivy. Nothing will ever die. The desert will bloom with flowers. All creation will sing and worship their Creator.

It's hard for us to imagine a world free of sin and death. A world even more beautiful than this. But, that is what creation is groaning for. Creation is longing for the day to be set free from oppression and decay.

Creation has been groaning in pain like a mother giving birth to a child. That's the comparison Paul gives. Not only does creation groan, but we groan as well. Look at verses 23-25,

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. 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.

Believers Groan

God's people have a long history of groaning. In Exodus, Israel "groaned" under Egyptian slavery. God heard their groaning and unfolded his plan to redeem them through Moses (Ex 2:23). Likewise, Paul says, we who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly. The Holy Spirit is a foretaste and a promise of the glory to come. Why do we groan? Just look in the mirror—our bodies are falling apart! Have you noticed that? No matter how hard Kobe Bryant tries, he'll never play like he did in his 20's. But that is not how our bodies were meant to be. We were created to live forever. Not just our spirits, but our bodies. Jesus rose bodily from the grave so we too, when Jesus returns, will rise bodily from the grave. Our broken and dying bodies will be transformed into a glorified body. You'll get a new body in heaven! Listen to how Paul described this in 1 Corinthians 15, ***"For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies"*** (15:53, NLT). That's good news! Christians, along with creation, are both looking forward to that future. The best is yet

to come. All that we long to be and all that we long to have will one day happen. One day you will be glorified and fully made into the image of Christ, perfectly holy and righteous.

Paul is a realist. He says that we have this hope but we have to wait for it patiently. We have some of the goodies, but not all of them. Scholars call this the tension of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is here, right now, but it's also coming in the future. We live in a middle place between the already and not yet. We are already living in the kingdom but are waiting for Jesus to return and make all things new again and fully bring God's kingdom to earth. So, we've already been adopted and redeemed, but not completely. Our bodies still have not been glorified. We have been saved from sin, but not yet saved from the final day of judgment. We are stuck in the middle between our suffering and God's glory. So we wait. It's almost like the more you know God, the more suffering makes you miss him and groan for the restoration of all things. Creation groans for this and we groan too. Paul's next point is a surprising one—the Holy Spirit groans. Look at verses 26-27,

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.

The Spirit Groans

Have you ever come to a place in your life where you didn't have the words to pray or didn't know what to pray for? Have you ever been under so much pain and suffering that you just couldn't pray? In those moments, sometimes we don't know whether to pray for God to deliver us from our suffering or for God to give us strength to endure the suffering. The entire theme of Romans 8 is how to live the victorious life in the power of the Holy Spirit. What's the Spirit's role in our suffering? He prays for us. Think about that for a moment. Did you know the Holy Spirit prays for you? He intercedes, which means he pleads and petitions God the Father on our behalf. How does the Holy Spirit know what to pray for? Paul says he searches our hearts. That means he knows our motives, our deep desires, our fears, our hopes, and can pray for us better than we can. His prayers directly align to the will of the Father. The Spirit groans within us in prayer.

By the way, this has nothing to do with speaking in tongues as some believe. It's clear here that the groaning is wordless. What Paul means is that the Holy Spirit identifies with our weakness, our struggles, our pain and shares in our longing for Jesus to return. We groan together. Maybe you are facing a deep personal loss, or are facing a major decision in your life, or maybe you are dealing with your own sin and failure. Whatever it is, the Spirit helps you to pray. And even when you don't pray, he is praying

for you! I find this so encouraging. I often struggle to pray and feel guilty about that. But, even in my absent prayers, the Holy Spirit never stops praying. He's always praying for you!

Pastor Sinclair Ferguson shared the following story to illustrate the Spirit's involvement in our prayer life: "When I was a little boy, I used to be taken in the summer to the Northern coast of Scotland to see my mother's relatives. My mother had a cousin who had been grievously ill when he was just recently married at the age of 21, and he had become absolutely paralyzed. There was only one thing he could do with his body: he could move his head a bit, and if they put a cup of tea in his hand he could move the tea, and he could sip the tea. He used to sit in a wheelchair and from time to time he would make guttural noises: 'Uuuuh ... Uuuuh ... Uuuuh.' And after I got over the fright, the fear of the unknown, and the strange, I began to notice that every time these groans came from him, the woman he had married when he was 21 would appear by some, it seemed, mystical gift of interpretation, and give him exactly what he wanted."

That's how we are sometimes, we're paralyzed and we don't know how to pray. And in this world, sometimes to this world, we seem insignificant and unimportant and to be passed by and to be despised. But the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

How can the follower of Jesus endure suffering? First, we have a future hope of glory. Second, we have the Holy Spirit's help. And in verses 28-30 Paul ends this passage by reminding us of God's work in everything. Let's read verses 28-30,

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

Nothing Can Stop God's Purpose to Glorify Us

In verse 28 Paul gives us five unshakeable truths about God. These are five promises that can transform the good, the bad and the suffering of life. First, God is at work in our lives. It doesn't matter what you think or how you feel or what is going on in your life. If you are a child of God, he is at work! Second, God is at work for our good. It's really important that you understand what Paul isn't saying here. It doesn't say that all things that happen are good. Some things are terrible and happen for no reason at all. That's why we groan. Things don't always work together for good either. Sometimes things work out, sometimes they don't. Suffering isn't fun. Suffering is not good but God is at work for our good. Third, God works for our good in all things. No matter what happens—good, bad, ugly, whatever—God works for good in **all** things! That means we don't need to fear

anything that comes our way because God can and will take anything and all things and use it for our good.

Remember the story of Joseph from the book of Genesis? His brothers are jealous of him and his pretty coat so they beat him up and sell him to a slave trader. He rises through the ranks in Potiphar's house only to be falsely accused of rape by Potiphar's cougar wife. In prison, Joseph interprets people's dreams for them. Pharaoh hears about this and brings Joseph into his chambers to interpret his dream and the next thing you know Joseph is running all Egypt. The only person greater than him is Pharaoh. Then, one day, during the famine, his brothers come in to beg for grain. They don't recognize Joseph. And when he finally tells them who he is, they are shocked. Afterwards Joseph says these powerful words, "*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives*" (Genesis 50:20). What Joseph went through was not good and completely unfair. But God worked for his good (and the good of all Israel) in the midst of it all.

Fourth, God works for our good in all things for those who love him. Some of you are not going to like this, but according to Paul, this is only a promise for those who "love him," that is, those who have a relationship with God. It's not enough to believe in God. We know that even demons believe in God. In all things God works for the good of those who **love** him. God never promises us a comfortable and easy life. That's not what these verses are saying. But, in all things, he is working for our good for those who love him. Fifth, we have been called according to his purpose. That means God has called us into a relationship with him. And that relationship will include suffering. But, that suffering has a purpose—to mold us into the image of Jesus Christ. This means good things can be terrible for you, and bad things can be wonderful for you. That good promotion led to you seeing your family less. Getting fired from a job led you to a whole new satisfying career. Sometimes instead praying for God to change our situation, maybe we need to ask God to change our heart and our attitude in them.

In verses 29-30 Paul elaborates on verse 28 with five more undeniable affirmations of the Christian life. Everything that happens to us, God is using for our sanctification to make us more like Jesus. These five things are like a chain linked together. All five verbs Paul uses are in the past tense, suggesting that, though the attaining of glory may be future, it's already accomplished. First, God foreknew. To know in the Bible is to love. You could say God foreloved. God set his love on us before the beginning of time. Second, God predestined. God set a destination for us; to be with him and to be conformed into the image of Christ. This means God first loved us. He first initiated his saving grace long before we responded in faith. God wants nothing more than for you to become more like Jesus. Third, God called. The called are people who love God. Fourth, God justified. We are made right

and put into a right relationship with Jesus by his life, death and resurrection. Finally, God glorified. One day, all your sin will be eradicated. One day, you will be like Jesus! We started in verse 18 with glory and we ended in verse 30 with glory. Paul's overall point is this: God will bring glory out of our groaning.

Let me ask you again, what's causing you to groan this week? Whatever it is, do we live in hope with a confident and eager expectation of sharing in God's glory? Do you see everything that happens to you as part of God's way of conforming us to the image of his Son? God will not waste a moment of your suffering and groaning but is using it all for your glory.

With three kids, one of the things I have done lots of is put puzzles together. We started off with the easy big puzzle boards when they were young. But, as my kids got older, we've moved on to smaller more complex puzzles. Just recently my daughter and I put together a puzzle of horses running in the snow. It took some time and was difficult. The only way we were able to put

it together is because we had the picture on the box. Without the picture on the box, it would have been nearly impossible to put together. It would have taken much much longer and my daughter and I would have gotten frustrated and eventually given up. Paul tells us here that God causes all things to work together for good. Those "all things" are the pieces of the puzzle. He then tells us how they work together for the good, according to God's purpose. That is the picture of the puzzle.

Are you worried and frustrated over an event or something happening in your life? Don't take the situation out of God's hand and try to work it into your own design. God made the picture your life is composed of, and he will complete it, but only if you will let him. Trust him, he knows what he is doing. God will bring glory out of our groaning.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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