



PRACTICING THE RESURRECTION | GROANING TOGETHER (34)

May 18, 2025

Romans 8:22-27

PURPOSE

To discover and experience Jesus Christ in our midst
To cultivate mutually encouraging relationships
To participate in God's mission to the world

GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

Discussion Question

- What's the most intense physical pain you've experienced?

PLEASE OPEN IN PRAYER

INTRODUCTION

We're in a sermon series on Romans 8 inspired by N. T. Wright's book "Into the Heart of Romans." Paul continues the theme of suffering and glory and explains the role/importance of "groaning" or lament. Paul structures his argument by writing that the whole creation, we ourselves, and the Spirit all groan together and lament together waiting for the final redemption. While we are already justified and are God's children by the Spirit, the Apostle also draws on the concept of "already but not yet," encouraging the believers to eagerly and patiently wait for their future hope. As we suffer and lament waiting for the future glory, we have a great promise of the whole Trinity praying for us and with us — the Spirit intercedes for us. We're in a sermon series on Romans 8 called *Practicing the Resurrection*, and this week we'll look at the topic of "Groaning Together."

SCRIPTURE READING

Romans 8:22-27

²²For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³And 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. ²⁴For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

²⁶Likewise 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. ²⁷And 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.

BIBLE STUDY

1. Looking at the Bible

- From the passage, share with the group some keywords/themes that stood out to you.

Digging Deeper:

In this passage, Paul repeatedly uses the keyword of groaning (*stenazo*) to build his

argument. The whole creation “groans together” in verse 22, we ourselves “groan inwardly” in verse 23, and the Spirit himself intercedes for us “with groanings” in verse 26. The verb *stenazo* can also be translated as “to sigh” (Mark 7:34) or “to lament” (2 Corinthians 5:2-4). N. T. Wright writes that this section is primarily about the Church’s vocation: We are called to go into the world to lament together with the suffering world. Wright contends that our primary calling as Christians is to lament: to stand in the place of pain in humility, sorrow, and hope. He explains:

Paul is talking about our vocation not just to get through difficult times but to stand in prayer where the world is in pain so that God’s own spirit may be present, and intercede, right there. This is one of the most revolutionary and innovative moments in the whole letter. Paul here fills out both his Trinitarian theology of new creation and his pastoral understanding of the depths of the Christian heart, and joins them together.

Paul introduces our state of being in between the present hope in which we are saved and the future hope in the glorious redemption of our bodies in verses 24-25. The passage is contextualizing the present work of lament, which anticipates the future promised work of the redemption of all creation (Wright). The call to be a people of lament is a vocation modeled by God himself in the Holy Spirit. Paul writes how all three persons of the Trinity work together to pray with us (verses 26-27). In his Romans commentary, Douglas Moo explains:

There is one in heaven, the Son of God, who intercedes on our behalf, defending us from all charges that might be brought against us, guaranteeing salvation in [sic] the day of judgment. But there is also, Paul asserts in these verses, an intercessor “in the heart,” the Spirit of God, who effectively prays to the Father on our behalf throughout the difficulties and uncertainties of our lives here on earth.

2. Looking at Jesus

At Central we believe that all of Scripture points to Jesus. In other words, Jesus is the theological center of the Bible. Every passage not only points to Jesus, but the grand narrative of the Bible also finds its fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus.

- In verses 26-27, Paul writes twice that the Spirit himself intercedes for the believers. How do other people’s intercessory prayers encourage us? How might the Spirit’s intercession “help us in our weakness”?

Digging Deeper:

In today’s passage, we have a picture of the whole Trinity helping us in prayer: the Spirit prays for us and with us to the Father (“the one who searches hearts” in verse 27) through the work and in the name of the Son. Paul later writes in the same chapter that Jesus also intercedes for us (8:34), and other biblical authors emphasize Jesus’ ministry of intercession (Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 2:1). The same Lord who prayed for Peter’s faith (Luke 22:31-32) sends his Spirit to us, who is also our Intercessor and Advocate (John 14:16). Thus “the children of God have two divine intercessors,” writes John Murray. “Christ is their intercessor in the court of heaven” while “the Holy Spirit is their intercessor in the theatre of their own hearts.”

Jesus and the Spirit's interceding for us as saints has been the source of great encouragement for numerous theologians. John Bunyan, the Puritan author of "The Pilgrim's Progress," wrote, "Let this doctrine give thee boldness to come to God. Shall Jesus Christ be interceding in heaven? Oh, then, be thou a praying man on earth; yea, take courage to pray." Similarly, Robert M'Cheyne, the Scottish minister, said, "If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies. Yet distance makes no difference. He is praying for me." Finally, the Dutch theologian Louis Berkhof wrote:

It is a consoling thought that Christ is praying for us, even when we are negligent in our prayer life; that He is presenting to the Father those spiritual needs which were not present to our minds and which we often neglect to include in our prayers; and that He prays for our protection against the dangers of which we are not even conscious, and against the enemies which threaten us, though we do not notice it. He is praying that our faith may not cease, and that we may come out victoriously in the end.

3. Looking at our Hearts

- Paul talks about hope in verses 24-25. How is the Apostle encouraging the Roman believers to have hope in the midst of their suffering?

Digging Deeper:

"For in this hope we were saved" (verse 24). This verb "we were saved" is in the past tense, referring to our justification (verse 2). We have been born again to a living hope through the work of Christ (1 Peter 1:3). However, Paul also talks about the coming future hope that the creation is waiting for (verses 20-21) and that is yet to be seen (verse 25). This passage is an example of what can be referred to as "eschatological tension" — the "already/not yet" of Christ's kingdom — similar to how we are already God's children (verse 16) but simultaneously waiting for the adoption, the glorious redemption (verse 23). John Stott explains in his commentary:

This whole section is a notable example of what it means to be living "in between times," between present difficulty and future destiny, between the already and not yet, between sufferings and glory. "We were saved in hope" brings them together. And in this tension the correct Christian posture is that of waiting, waiting "eagerly" (23) with keen expectation, and waiting patiently (25), steadfast in the endurance in our trials... the combination is significant. We are to wait neither so eagerly that we lose our patience, nor so patiently that we lose our expectation, but eagerly and patiently together.

Paul categorizes hope as waiting for something that can't be seen. The author of Hebrews also writes, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Paul previously explained that the "sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (verse 18). Paul is encouraging us to eagerly and patiently look forward to the unseen things that are eternal.

For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:17-18)

4. Looking at our World

- Last week we looked at the Church's responsibility in renewing the world. As creation has been groaning due to sin and fallen nature, how can we fulfill our vocation to be God's image-bearers in this suffering world?

Digging Deeper:

Paul instructs the believers to "weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15) and "if one member suffers, all suffer together" (1 Corinthians 12:26). We are the ones with the gospel, the good news of hope, so as we lament together, we can point others toward the hope in which we were saved (Romans 12:24). We can also model grieving with hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13) and be prepared to respond to anyone inquiring about the hope they see in us (1 Peter 3:15). N. T. Wright summarizes:

When Jesus breathed his Spirit on his followers, he said, "As the Father sent me, so I send you." And where had the Father sent him? To the place where the world was in direst pain, so that he could take it upon himself. Our vocation, by the Spirit, places us, right now, where the world is in pain, so that...we can be in prayer right there.

SHARING Share your prayer requests, thoughts, hopes and fears for the coming week, and as you do consider how this passage might give light to what you are sharing.

KINGDOM Pray that we would see ourselves called by God.

PRAYER Include other prayer requests.

SENDING God's word is a lamp to our feet. Christ's teachings are a light to our path. May God's word take root in our lives. May Christ's love nourish and sustain us. Amen.