

Romans 8:28

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[0 : 00] I've grown up every summer going to a house on the shore of Lake Erie that my mom grew up in. We go there for vacation, learn how to sail, sunfish there, play in the sand, swim, all sorts of wonderful things. I have a very vivid memory one day. My two brothers and I took out our old, and if you know anything about boats, slightly leaky and fairly rickety sunfish. Three of us on a slightly waterlogged boat with a rudder that kept popping out if you pushed it too hard against the waves of the wind and the pressure. We decided to take this boat out on a quite windy day where the breakers were breaking over the sandbar, and as we headed out in the southeasterly direction with the southwest wind blowing us this way, we set a course, and if you head out, the first thing you need to do is to get enough momentum to turn the boat and get back into the bay. We lived in a bay that sort of circled around like this, and if we didn't get back into the bay, we'd get pushed out over the reef and out into the lake. Well, hard over, the winds are pushing this way. The waves are pushing this way.

The rudder kept popping out every time. We couldn't come about. My brother even jumped off the boat and tried to swim the bow of the boat out to the right direction. Eventually, we gave up, and as we sang, we all live in this yellow submarine, we headed out into the eastern end of Lake Erie, and if you know anything about the geography of Lake Erie, it dumps itself into the Niagara River, which is one of the strongest currents in the world and ends in Niagara Falls, which is a lovely place to be, but not on a sailboat. All of our strategies in the face of winds and waves had failed. We had no way to help ourselves, and we are headed out to sea, so to speak, uncertain as to how it would turn out, or how we would be saved.

I think many of you have experienced times in your life when you have faced things that are overwhelming, when you don't know what to do anymore, when all of your strategies have failed, failed, and where you wonder where your help is going to come from.

It might be in your studies, as you face the overwhelming amount of work, and your inability to actually accomplish it and complete it. It may be in your marriages, as you see the path ahead only being full of briars and thorns and darkness. It may be when the bottom falls out in your life, and you lose your job, and you lose your home.

It may be that the relationships you've leaned on suddenly disappear. In the face of trials, in the face of suffering, in the face of life in a fallen world, we feel often overwhelmed, alone, and helpless.

[4 : 04] So where do we turn? We read Psalm 121. This is what the psalmist asks. Where does my help come from? That's what we're going to talk about this morning.

And as we talk about it, I want to say this. It is a weighty thing for us to talk about. We are delving into the depths, yes, of theology, but even more of the depths of our experience of God and the reality of the gospel at work in our lives.

It is a privilege, and I know I speak for Greg and for Nick, it is a privilege as our pastors to walk with you and know many of you are facing situations like this even now.

And we hope, because this passage points us to a place of hope this morning. We're in Romans chapter 8. I forgot to write down the number.

Anyone? It's in the bulletin. I heard lots of murmurs and no number. It's in the bulletin. So, Romans chapter 8.

[5 : 17] We're going to continue in our series as we've looked on this. But the fundamental message of this passage that we're going to look at this morning is this.

God is with you to help you. It's not very complicated. I hope it will be meaningful as we explore this passage together.

So, let's read Romans. We're going to start all the way back in verse 16 of Romans 8 in order to get the run-up. We're going to be focusing particularly on verses 26 and 27 this morning.

So, let's read and look together. 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, 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. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

[6 : 27] For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, 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.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruit of the Spirit, grown inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

For in this hope we are saved. Not now. Hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes in what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

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.

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. Let's pray together.

[7 : 49] Lord, we thank you for your word. And we thank you that it is not just advice, not just information.

But Lord, in your word. Lord, you point us to life and hope in you. And you point us most of all to yourself. Who you are and what you have done for us in Christ.

And Lord, as we look at this passage this morning, I pray that you would help us to see and to know and to have confidence that you are God who helps.

Lord, that you have not left us abandoned or alone or without help. But Lord, you are with us to help us.

Lord, I pray that you would, by your Spirit, work in us this morning for your glory, for your namesake, and for our good.

[9 : 02] Lord, we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. The context of this passage, as we've read it, I want to just run you quickly through the flow of thought so that we see where we're coming.

Because these verses, 26 and 27, that we're looking at this morning, it'd be very easy to take out of context. In fact, many times in the church, they have been taken as an isolated unit and then taken in all sorts of interesting directions, interpretively.

And so, I want to ground it in the argument. Paul has said, going all the way back to verse 16, you are, for those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ, you are now children of God.

He has declared it and he has made you so. And therefore, as you face sufferings in this world, right?

Verse 17 and following. As you face sufferings, you have recognized that these sufferings, as great as they actually are, are not worth comparing to the salvation and the glory that results from it that is for all who have placed their faith in Christ.

[10 : 19] And he says, he goes on, he says, for creation was subject to the futility of corruption. That is, the fall of humanity has corrupted everything.

So, we live in this place that's so hard to live in. And in fact, we ourselves groan, longing for this fullness of redemption because we know in ourselves we are not yet what we could be and what we ought to be.

And we struggle and we groan in this gap between what is now and what has been promised, the reality of our present sufferings and the glory, the beauty of this future that God has accomplished for us and awaits us in Christ.

And this is the hope that sustains us. And then we come to verse 26 and he says, likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

And then he explains why. He explains how it is that the Spirit helps us in our weakness just as this future glory gives us strength to persevere in our present suffering.

[11 : 37] Likewise, the Spirit helps us. How is it that the Spirit helps us? Look again at verse 26. First of all, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. What is this weakness?

I hardly feel like I need to say anything about this. But let's just explore it for a minute. Do you know your weakness? Do you know that you live in a fallen world where it's not going to be as it should be?

Do you understand that your inability to perfectly manage your life, to perfectly live a life of righteousness, to perfectly respond to trials and to the fallenness of the world, do you understand this is what Paul is saying in your weakness?

All of us suffer from this weakness. Paul is saying, I get it. All of you are experiencing these things in various ways.

And just as Nick talked about two weeks ago, and so we experience the painfulness like the pain of childbirth. And friends, it goes on for this life, because the childbirth now is producing the glory later. [13:05] So we suffer these trials. If you haven't been here the last couple of weeks and heard Nick and Greg expound 18 through 25, go back and listen to them.

I don't want to re-preach their sermons, but they did a beautiful job in explaining and digging into what is it about life in this fallen world that's so profound.

Go back and listen to them if you're wondering how to connect to that. So first, Paul says, the Spirit helps us in our weakness, and that weakness is connecting to the groaning, the groaning of creation, and the groaning of the children of God, as we long for what is not yet, and look forward to it.

But then he goes on and he says, specifically, we have a particular kind of weakness, right? Look at verse 26 again, the second half. For we do not know how to pray as we ought. And this is particularly about life in between the now and the not yet.

When you are suffering, what do you pray for? Do you pray for relief that God would take the trial away? Or do you pray for sustaining grace, that God will carry you through this without removing it? [14:23] Friends, if you feel confused about that, welcome to the club. The Apostle Paul thought that. In Philippians 1, he says, well, I long to go and to be with Christ, but I think it's better for me to stay and be with you.

But he felt the pull and the tug. Now, Paul seems to have resolved it there, but think about other places. In Acts 16, he wants to go over here to Bithynia to preach the gospel, and God says, no, that's not the right thing to go.

I want to take you over to Macedonia. Or think about 2 Corinthians 12. Paul's suffering. Whatever his thorn of the flesh is, it is suffering for him.

And he pleads, Lord, take it away. Three times, Lord, take it away. The Lord says, no. See, you don't know how to pray as you ought.

My grace is sufficient for you. My power is made perfect in your weakness. Preacher Charles Spurgeon talks about the confusion of our prayer in this way.

[15:32] How can I pray? My mind wanders. I chatter like a crane. I roar like a beast in pain. I moan in the brokenness of my heart, but oh my God, I know not what is my inmost spirit, what it is my inmost spirit needs.

Or if I know it, I know not how to frame my petitioner right before you. I know not how to open my lips in your majestic presence. I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

My spiritual distress robs me of the power to pour out my heart before my God. Friends, if you haven't faced this confusion yet, you will.

And if you think that your prayer life needs to be encompassed by theologically precise, carefully crafted, beautifully articulate prayers, let the scriptures correct you.

You don't know how to pray as you ought. And when you're pushed in the face of suffering and trial, you will get there and you will know.

[17:00] But the passage goes on. He says, the Spirit helps us. Even though we are in this place of weakness, even though we don't know how to pray, the Spirit is there.

And He has come to help us, right? Look at the second half of 26. The Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. Now, the commentators have spilled more ink than I have time to even repeat this morning about what all of this actually means.

I'm going to cut to the chase. If you want to talk to me about it afterwards, you can ask me all of your questions. But I think the clearest meaning of this is that the Spirit, because He dwells within us, which we've already learned earlier in Romans 9-11, because the Spirit dwells within us, He is writing on our hearts and working in our groanings to God that are inarticulate.

He is writing on our hearts these longings and desires that we cannot put into words. And as then we groan these things towards God, He takes them to the Lord.

We'll see that in the next verse a little bit more. But here, I think the clearest sense is that His intercession is not for us, like He is standing between us and God and telling to God what we can't articulate, but in fact He is working in us and through us these groanings, these expressions of longing.

[18 : 45] And somehow, in the mystery of the fact that God Himself dwells within us, in the place of our greatest trial, where the greatest pressure is, God tells us the Spirit is there working.

I am with you. John Piper says this, one of the reasons this matters so much is that it means that in the very moment of some of our deepest frustrations, our groanings are the very work of God's Spirit for us and not against us.

Remember, Paul is helping us to endure the suffering and futility and decay and the groaning of this world. That is the point of all of these verses. And here, he encourages us by saying that our weakness in this world will always include some ignorance about what the will of God is and how to pray.

And in that ignorance, to know that God is with us in the middle of it. So friends, when you face those overwhelming circumstances, when you feel like you've been abandoned and are alone and there's no help, the Spirit helps you in your weakness.

The Spirit helps me in our weakness with these groanings that He writes on our hearts. There's a place in Branford, I can't remember what it's called, it might just be called the Trolley Trail or something like that.

[20 : 22] Some of you may be familiar with it. You get there by going out to Stony Creek. But there's a trail out there where you can walk on what used to be a railroad track. And in the last couple of years, that has been, for me, a place where I go and groan.

Drop the kids off to school, head on out, grab a cup of coffee along the way, and then I walk. And often I would walk in the sunshine, sometimes I'd walk in the cold of the winter.

And I often didn't have words to pray. I often didn't know what to say or what to ask for. Feelings, the groanings, the longings that spilled out of my heart as I walked, sometimes with tears of pain or of grief, sometimes of longing, expressing my longing for God and for His kingdom and His will, sometimes for help and for healing.

sometimes the old Episcopalian liturgy that I learned way back when, Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy. I think that's as articulate as I got a lot of the time. In these times when it often felt like God was far off and I cried, where are you?

[22 : 06] I was reminded by this passage and others. The Spirit is with me. The Spirit was with me. The Spirit will be with me.

And these groanings and these times, He's helping. maybe you've been there.

Maybe you haven't been there yet. Jesus did promise us in this world you will have tribulation. I doubt that you will make it through this life without a moment where you will face this kind of depth. death. And I hope that this verse, this passage will be an anchor for your soul at that time.

That you will cling to this and say I am not abandoned and I am not alone. And even though I don't even know what to say, God is with me. He's my help.

[23 : 07] I do want to say this, friends. This is for those who have the Spirit of God. That is for those who have believed in Christ Jesus.

And if you're here this morning and you are facing deep waters and great storms and you are looking for help, friends, the help is there but it comes first of all by looking at the foot of, by standing at the foot of the cross, by looking at Jesus who in his sufferings for us, for our sin cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

He who interceded for us and entered in with us in our sin so that we might be forgiven, so that we might have new life, so that we might be restored in a relationship to God.

I hope this morning that in the midst of your storm and in the midst of your pain, you hear the invitation. The Lord says, come, come to me and abandon yourself to me and my salvation.

Trust in Christ, receive my spirit and I will be your help. And if you're here this morning and you have placed your faith in Christ, then that help is there, right there for you.

[24 : 51] Remember this and have hope. our hope. But the spirit not only helps us by standing with us in the middle of suffering, but verse 27 tells us that there's more than that.

Verse 27 says that the spirit stands for us and that in his work he is bringing about God's perfect and best will for our lives.

so let's look at verse 27 we want to read it again it's not a simple passage and not a simple verse he says 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 what does this mean let's try to take it apart a little bit so that we know first of all who is he who searches our hearts friends this is God the father you can look throughout scripture this is the description of God the father the one who knows the thoughts and intentions of our hearts God the father is searching our hearts the depths he's he is looking into the depths of the groaning that we are bringing before him that does not have articulation that does not have words to capture it God is searching our hearts and he knows the mind of Christ and if I understand this rightly this is not the mind of Christ that we saw back in verses six and seven which is contrasted with the mind of the flesh that's in rebellion against God this is God knows what the spirit is doing as he is writing on our hearts these groans and these cries that we cannot articulate God knows what the spirit is doing through us and as the spirit is working through us with these groans of prayer where we cry out to the Lord God the father is looking in that and he knows how to respond because he knows the mind of the spirit because the mind of the spirit knows our perfect knows God's perfect will for us there is this beautiful convergence of the three persons of the trinity in us Christ is assumed God the father looks into the groanings of our hearts he sees what the spirit is writing on our hearts to accomplish the perfect will of God which we will see in this whole chapter of Romans 8 is about us being conformed to the image of Christ and living out the salvation that he has accomplished in Christ for us this is a beautiful thing it is not an easy thing for us to wrap our minds around let me read another commentator who tries to elucidate exactly what's going on here as God searches the heart of the children of God he finds unuttered and unutterable groanings though they are thus inarticulate there is a meaning and intent that cannot escape the omniscient eye of God that is they are wholly intelligible to him and furthermore they are found to be in accordance with his will they agree with his will because though surpassing our understanding and ability to articulate they are written by the Holy Spirit and are the ways in which the Holy Spirit's intercession comes to expression in us consciously and since they are the intercessions of the Holy Spirit for us they always meet with understanding and approval

God is for you in a profound way and the Holy Spirit is now interceding his writing on our hearts bringing the will of God to bear on this unutterable groaning that we have gives us this absolutely unshakable confidence that God will do what is good and right in our lives in the face of the biggest storm we have one who is interceding for us doing things that we cannot do for ourselves so that God's good would be done in our lives stealing an illustration from Spurgeon it's like we are poor uneducated people who are being sued by unscrupulous people by an unscrupulous man who wants to take all of our land and all of our property away and we don't know what to say we don't know how to fight this charge we know that it's come to us and we feel ourselves completely unable to defend ourselves in court against these accusations and then one of the great lawyers of the land comes and says

[30 : 42] I will take up your case I understand the law I understand the matters and the means that of what's going on here and I will give you words I will allow you to I will give you the ability to plead your case I will intercede for you and I will defend you and I will stand for you and I will accomplish what is right in this circumstance we who are helpless then have one an advocate who comes alongside of us and is able to do all the things that we aren't able to do so that what may be right in our lives would actually be the outcome it's always humbling to have an illustration like that because we have to admit that we are poor and we are inarticulate and we are unable takes humility for us to know how desperately we need this help but what this passage tells us is that that help is the best help you could ever have

Spurgeon ends this illustration by saying how happy are you and I that we have the Holy Spirit to be our counselor to be our advocate because when the Holy Spirit intercedes for us as he is standing for us before God and speaking through us these words to God the Father who receives them and approves them and will accomplish them because they are according to his will it means that even though our circumstances suggest that God's will is not being done when we suffer when we face trials and we think God can this really be your will this is so hard this is too hard God I cannot bear

this can this really be what you want to do God comes and says yes
I am working out my perfect will for you look at look with me at the text again friends this is what launches us into these beautiful words that we know so well 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 in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and those whom he predestined he also called and those whom he called he also justified and those whom he justified he also glorified just let that sink in he is working all things for good for those who love him what you are walking through now is a part of his good plan and it does not mean that the thing you are enduring must be called good it may be evil it may be suffering but God is working for good in it and not only is he working for good but he is working for you so that you might accomplish the fullness of what Christ saved you for which is that you might be conformed to his image that you would be transformed out of your fallenness your sin your ignorance of God your rebellious independent ways your desire to do things on your own your selfishness your unwillingness to allow him to be king in your life God is going to rescue you from all of that and bring you into this place where you will be conformed to the image of Jesus who is perfectly what we are meant to be as human beings and then he reminds us in verse 30 of the process God has chosen you God has called you God has declared you right before him and God is taking you to glory and so he goes back to this theme of glory that we have already seen in verses 18 through 25 brothers sisters do you see the Holy Spirit is interceding for you so that you might have these things and he will not fail he will bring you home he will take you to this place and I know it doesn't feel like that for some of you I know for some of you it just looks like darkness and hopelessness and pain it's unbearable but it's not that's what this verse has to say to us no eye has seen no ear has heard nor the heart of men imagine what God has prepared for those who love him so what do we respond to this first of all I don't know about you but when things are hard sometimes praying is the last thing I want to do I don't want to talk to him it's too hard but friends do you see what this passage is telling us about our prayers you don't have to come to God with anything but your groanings you don't have to muster articulation you don't have to have good words to say because our prayer is entering into a conversation within the Trinity that is already happening for your behalf
[37 : 26] Christ is standing giving you access to the throne of God the spirit is working in you stirring these longings and these groanings and even exposing this pain for you to bring to God the Father the one who loves you the one who is accomplishing his perfect will in your life you don't have to do anything but just run to him and fall on him and let him catch you and know that the spirit in you is with you and the spirit in you is for you in that moment pray pray pray as you face trials I'll give you the GPS to that trail in Branford if you want to go walk with me and we'll just groan together that'll be good pray allow your prayer life to be messy if you need help let the psalms be your guide the psalms are not neat and tidy if you think they are you haven't read them carefully go back and read them again and let them be your guide the commentator

Murray says this the encouragement extended to the people of God is that the unuttered groans are the index to the fact that God does exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think we ask we can go to God in prayer because we are weak and because we don't know what to pray and the Holy Spirit is there with us and we are not effective in prayer because we know exactly how to pray rightly we are effective in prayer because we have nothing to bring but the Spirit is with us and so we can bring everything and let God do what He's going to do in our lives so we need to pray and we need to hold on to hope this is what

Romans 8 is all about it's why we're preaching through it it's because God has done in Christ all that is necessary for you to be secure in Him secure in your relationship with Him secure in your forgiveness where there is no longer any condemnation secure in your battle to do what is right and to live a righteous life because now the Spirit is in you and has set you free from the slavery of sin you are secure now because He has called you His sons and His daughters and heirs of His kingdom that is yet to come you are secure because the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the first fruits of the resurrection that we will anticipate and experience one day with Him and you are secure when you head out to sea and your rudder is too weak and the waves are too big and the wind is too strong there is a glory waiting for you and the Spirit is with you friends this is our hope this is the good news of the gospel for us let's pray Lord have mercy Christ have mercy Lord have mercy upon us for we are weak and we need your help

Lord I pray this morning Lord that these truths would sink deep into our souls Lord and that we might know your Spirit's work in us Lord that we would know it in our heads that we would know it in the depths of our souls
God we pray that you would give us hope today Lord I pray these things in Jesus name Amen