

3. The Spirit Groans

Our failure to grasp the depth of the plight of the world is our weakness, and so we really don't know how to pray. When words fail us, how does God's Spirit step in to help us? In what way is this better than using our own words?

26 And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. 27 And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will. - Romans 8:22-27 NLT

Not only does God's Spirit dwell in His people, but the Spirit comes along side to help us. Jesus referred to the Spirit as the Comforter, or Advocate, in Greek *paraklētos* which means one called to one's side especially to bring aid.

*In light of the Spirit's title of *paraklētos*, how do you view your role in intercessory prayer? What is one major issue in the world that you need the *paraklētos* to help you know how to pray for?*

WRAP-UP

All creation, echoes with groaning like labor pains, longing for freedom from decay and death. This encompasses the natural world as well as mankind. Our hope rests in God's promise of a renewed creation, begun at Jesus' resurrection and sealed with the Holy Spirit's presence. As believers, God calls us to join Him in intercession in the places of pain in our world- over sin, sickness, poverty, war, chaos, and exploitation. In our weakness, God's Spirit comforts and advocates for us and with us, aligning our prayers with God's will and embodying hope for restoration in the new heaven and new earth He promises.

MEMORY VERSE

26 And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. - Romans 8:26 NLT

Challenge- Read Psalm 130 several times and make it a prayer of your own.

All Creation Groans Romans 8 - Week 6

INTRODUCTION

When there is suffering and when there is pain, our words might not be adequate to express what we are experiencing. And when that happens the outlet of our pain may become a groan that wells up from the depths of our soul. Paul is giving the Romans an explanation of the groanings going on around us. He sees all creation groaning, believers are groaning, and the Holy Spirit is groaning. In this section of his letter, Paul shows us how these groanings are intertwined and how we are joining together with the Spirit of God when we lament and groan over the suffering in God's creation.

Ice Breaker

What is one thing that has caused you to lament?

Key Passage

22 For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us. 24 We were given this hope when we were saved. (If we already have something, we don't need to hope for it. 25 But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.) 26 And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. 27 And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will. - Romans 8:22-27 NLT

STUDY QUESTIONS

1 All Creation Groans

21 the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. 22 For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. - Romans 8:21-22 NLT

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! - 2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV

11 The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you. - Romans 8:11 NLT

Those who have given birth know that labor pain is intense, but it has a purpose- to create new life. And so, it is paradoxically both horrible and hopeful. Paul tells us creation's groanings are like labor pains. But what is included in creation, and what is it hopeful about giving birth to?

In Greek, as in English, the word creation (ktisis) can be both a verb and a noun - in this passage, "all creation" is everything that has been created by God. So, included in all of creation is the natural world, the plants and animals, the land, water and sky.

All creation longs for freedom from death and decay promised in God's new world (v.21). As God's children we already have a glimpse of God's new world. Based on the verses above, when and how did we get a preview of the new creation? We live in the tension of "now but not yet". What part of the new creation do we experience now, and what have we not yet experienced but will in the future?

7 Then the LORD told him, "I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. 8a So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land. - Exodus 3:7-8a NLT

God has always been aware of the suffering of His people. (Ex 3:7)

What was God's response to the suffering of Israel in slavery to Egypt? When has God shown up to rescue you personally from suffering?

All creation longs for healing from the curse of sin, and God will bring about that healing through the rebirth of a new earth. In fact, He is in the process of healing His creation now. The work of creating a new heaven and new earth began when Jesus was resurrected., and the Holy Spirit was given as God's promise that we would be transformed just as Jesus was.

2. Believers Groan

As a part of God's creation, we too groan and lament in pain over the state of our world and in anticipation of our promised future.

23 And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us. 24 We were given this hope when we were saved. (If we already have something, we don't need to hope for it. 25 But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.) - Romans 8:23-25 NLT

Verse 25 gives us the two perspectives we must balance as we wait for God's promises to be fulfilled: hope and patience. As you intercede for lost loved ones, for healing, for injustice in the world or for forgiveness for sins of yourself and others, in which of these do you find it hard to be patient and in which do you find it hard to remain hopeful?

We are beginning to see the way that God uses His people to step into the pain of His creation and experience the sorrow and instill hope through them. The Spirit in us experiences our pain and shares God's heart with us. In His humanity Jesus also carried our pain and lamented.

*4 Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins!
- Isaiah 53:4 NLT*

It is the calling of believers to join with God in lament, and intercession for this world. We see this in the Psalms prayed for centuries in anticipation of the coming messiah who would set right a world broken by sin. We see it in the Lord's prayer when we pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven". Because the Spirit lives in us, we long to see the whole creation as it was intended to be. We see it in Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, asking the Father if there might be another way, but yielding to God's will to redeem the world. When we allow ourselves to join in that sorrow we participate in Christ's suffering.
Pause for a moment to reflect on depth of God's grief over all of creation.