



Growth Group Curriculum
Week 3 – May 2, 2021 – Romans 8:18-25

Growth groups are one of the best and easiest ways to find community at church. In this time of the virus and social distancing, please meet safely outside or online. If your growth group would like to meet online or if you are aware of needs that the church can help fill, please let us know at connect@ljpres.org. Thank you for loving and caring for each other.

In our text for today, the apostle Paul takes up the issue of suffering from both a cosmic as well as personal perspective. He reflects on how humankind’s sinfulness has subjected all of creation to frustration. But, there will be a day, when this bondage to decay will end. Creation will experience liberation. Suffering, though, is not just cosmic. It is personal. Paul never flinches from reminding believers that suffering is a part of the journey for those who choose to follow Jesus.

However, suffering does not have the final word, because at some point in the future, God’s glory will be revealed in us. We will be redeemed, we will be adopted into God’s family as his beloved sons and daughters. This glory will be so much greater than any suffering that we have to endure here on earth, that they cannot be compared. The creation itself is pictured as eagerly awaiting that time when the glorious future of the “sons and daughters of God” is realized. JB Phillips’s translation says, “The whole creation is on tiptoe to see the wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own.”

Paul says the entire universe is in travail and uses the image of childbirth. Like in childbirth, the pain is not meaningless, but instead carries hopes of new life. In much the same way, we ourselves “groan inwardly” as we await the final hour of our adoption when our bodies will be redeemed.

We do have the firstfruits of the Spirit, but things are still not right. We groan inwardly until all things are restored and our bodies are redeemed. So Paul says, as we wait, we wait with hope. Our salvation involves the hope that our mortal bodies will someday be liberated from the bondage of decay. It is important see here that we are not saved “by hope”, but our salvation is “characterized” by hope. Since salvation, viewed in its completeness, is in the future, we must wait for it in hope.



The picture that Paul paints in this section is eschatological. Paul looks to the very end when all of the created universe will celebrate together. There will be one final redemption and restoration. As sin brought the curse of death to the physical universe, the day is coming when a new heaven and earth (see Revelation 21:1) will be in place. They will take their place with the children of God in the perfect freedom of a sinless universe.

Exploring the Text

Romans 8:18-25

¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. ²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Questions

If you are answering these questions alone, we would urge you to try journaling. Rather than just pondering the answers, try writing them out along with a prayer to the Lord.

- 1) After a year of a lot of restrictions, what is one thing you “hope” to do this year?
- 2) The apostle Paul talks about creation being subjected to futility. He talks about creation groaning. Why do you think Paul says this? Do you believe that creation groans or is subjected to futility? Why or why not?
- 3) Can you think of ways that you have seen the Holy Spirit produce patience in you, while you are dealing with difficult issues?
- 4) What do you think are the “firstfruits” of the Spirit, that Paul mentions? Is this different than the fruit of the Spirit that Paul writes about in Galatians 5:22-23?
- 5) The issue of suffering is always difficult. For those who follow Jesus it is often even more difficult to explain. How do you respond when people ask you why a “good” God would allow suffering?
- 6) What does it mean to hope for something that we do not see? What do you think Paul means by this?
- 7) How do you remain hopeful in difficult or stressful times?
- 8) Pastor Paul talked about the idea of stewarding our suffering. Henri Nouwen suggests that we should be wounded healers. How can we be “good stewards” of our suffering?

