

All I could do was groan, just groan. I had a deep, deep pain that had no words. It was a freak accident. I think it was three years ago. Three and a half years ago, I had a bicycle wreck on the Milwaukee Trail.

And I broke this arm into three pieces. And so there I was on the ground groaning. Nobody heard my groans. So I was able to get my phone out of my pocket, and I called Kedra, my wife, and left a message because I knew she wasn't available, saying, hey, I'm alive. I'll be okay.

And then I started calling people, and it's amazing how many people won't answer your phone. So finally I got a hold of a good friend, Rand Hamill, and he lives in Springville, and he said, I'll be right there. Well, from Springville to Milwaukee Trail is a little ways. So he and Kedra arrived at about the same time. And they picked me up and put me in a car and got me to the ER and got a lot of pain medicine and surgery eventually.

But there was a lot of groaning, and it ended with a plate and 17 screws, I think. Okay, so, you know, people come up to me and say, you are so screwed up. And I. I don't know how they know. How do they know? Sorry, that's really bad.

A few years earlier, not related to physical pain. Take that picture down now. I don't like looking at it. It's still in there. So a few years earlier, not related to physical pain.

All I could do was groan. And it was a different kind of groan, a different kind of pain that was not physical. And in my mind, it was. It was worse because it was a pain of kind confusion and crushed, destroyed dreams that I had. And so in 2018, after 20 years in a ministry that I loved, in a ministry that I planned to stay with, I left because I just couldn't go on.

Satan had entered into all of that and destroyed so much through denied, denied moral failure. Not mine, but someone else's. And then just poor, poor responses to it all the way around. And I tried to survive, and I did for a while, but I just. I just couldn't do it anymore.

I just. I couldn't go on. And so I left. And so I began a journey outside of ministry. And initially, it was filled with a great deal of hope and expectation.

But reality set in, and it ended in disappointment and deep, deep darkness. And in that darkness, there were days that it seemed like all I could do was groan. And I would cry out, oh, God, God, do something.

I Felt like I had failed miserably. And I guess you could argue that I had at that particular thing. But worse yet, and this is not true, but I felt this way. I felt like I was a failure. And that's not a good feeling to have, and you may know that.

But into my darkness, and it was very dark, a darkness filled with frequent groans, came a glimmer of light. And it was green, green light. And the green glimmer grew brighter and clearer. And the green light was Sean Green. See what I did there?

He's our lead minister in Bloomington. And I still shake my head at all this because it's so amazing. God is faithful. God is good. Through God's providence, I met Shawn, and we became very good friends.

And through that, a new hope and a new life came about for me. And here I am, nearly six years into a ministry that I still like. How did that happen? It's so wonderful. It's just amazing.

And I'm just so thankful. Sometimes in our grief and in our sorrow, in the messes that we make and then the messes that other people make for us, all we can do is groan.

All we can do is groan. Words won't come, or they seem woefully inadequate.

I'm guessing some of you in the room are there today. I don't know. Just don't have any words.

If you're not there, you've probably been there, or you will be at some point, or you know people who are.

Back in the 1500s, there was a man named John who went through something that was so dark, so depressing, it was so lonely. It was the kind of thing where you can only groan.

He wrote about it, and it's become quite famous over the years. And he called this darkness. He called it the dark night of the soul.

He says it's when God seems distant, when God seems silent, when God seems absent. It's when there are no words that are working in prayer or no words that will describe how you feel. It's like walking in darkness without any light at all.

But John, who describes this so powerfully, says, and he's called St. John of the Cross, he says the dark night of the soul is actually where and when God does some of his best work.

Though invisible, God is not absent, he says, and that's right. And though God is silent, he is present. And God quietly works in. In our

darkness, through our groans, to strip away idols and unhealthy attachments. And it's in the darkness that we can see the light of hope glimmering and then it grows into full blown assurance.

What causes you to groan?

Sometimes when I get up in the morning.

But you know, at a deeper level, what causes you to groan? Maybe it's disappointment. You thought things would be this way and they're not. Unmet expectations. It's just like, really?

Or maybe it's your sin. You think, ah, this is a day I'm not going to do it. It's like I did it again. Or maybe it's ruined relationships, a divorce you never wanted or saw coming, or division in your family that you never saw coming. Just so hard.

Or maybe, maybe it's disease, cancer, death. Somebody the other day said, there's just so, so much right now. And there is for a lot of us. There's so much and there's just grief all around it. And so I want to say this, this is a hopeful message.

It's very hopeful because if you are groaning, you don't groan alone. You don't groan alone. All of creation groans. And this is surprising. The Holy Spirit of God groans with us and for us.

Our text today is Romans 8:22 through 27. I had the privilege of wrestling with this for three weeks. And just like this is amazing. Paul starts this section in verse 18, I think it is. He says, listen, I know you're going through some stuff and I know it's rough, but what you are experiencing now is nothing compared to the glory of that will be revealed later.

Yeah, it's tough now, but, oh, it's going to be so great later. It's not to be compared. And then listen to what he says in verse 22. He says, for we know that all creation has been groaning, as in the pains of childbirth, right up to the present time. 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 the new bodies he has promised us. We were given this hope when we were saved. If we already have something, we don't need to hope for it. But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently, 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 with

words. 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.

That's pretty amazing. So Romans 8, 22 through 27 paints this profound and promising picture of present suffering and weakness that leads to longing and desire for more, better. And our belief in better days and better life allows hope to live within us. Now we believe that the suffering in this life is all a part of God's plan. It's often mysterious, frustrating, and confusing at times.

But the essence of faith is trusting God with all the unanswered questions. We just don't know, but we're going to say, I trust you. I don't know what you're doing, but I'm going to trust you that you are working. And this is hope. This is hope.

A confident expectation that God is working and will keep his promises. Paul says all of creation shares in this hope of redemption. He calls it an eager hope in verse 22. This hope, the hope of rooted in faith, is that someday we will be free from death, we'll be free from sin, we'll be free from disease, and everything in this life that leads us into darkness. Creation.

He says creation is longing for the days of Genesis 1 and 2 where everything was supposed to be like it was and everything was great. All of creation is waiting for the days of Genesis 3 to be over. Paul says this eager hope, often situated in pain, is like a mother in labor giving birth. One of the curses found in Genesis 3 is painful childbirth. I had the privilege of being in the room when four children were being born.

Four mine. It's an amazing, amazing process, really.

It's a painful process, hard to experience even as a pain free bystander. To watch my wife suffer in pain was hard. But you know what? I think Tim made reference to this last week. It's a pain that's not leading to death.

It's a pain of joyful anticipation and expectation. It's the pain of life that's leading to something new and wonderful, new life. And Paul says, creation. All of the world, the earth is longing and groaning for new life, restoration and renewal of paradise that it once enjoyed in Genesis 1 and 2. And he says, we all join in with Creation.

We're longing for something better, longing for the same thing as creation. So we groan. Even though we have the Holy Spirit as a foretaste of our glorious future. We groan because things are not right. They're not the way they're supposed to be.

We want new bodies. I do anyway. I want a body that doesn't age, that

doesn't break, that doesn't get sick, that doesn't get cancer, that doesn't die. I want to be in the presence of God, who has adopted me as His Son, who's adopted us as his children. I want to be in his presence where there's no more death, no more crying, no more mourning, all that's been done away with, according to Revelation 21.

The reality is we're not there yet. Even though we are saved and secure, we still live in a broken world as a broken people. And as a result, sometimes we groan. We groan, we groan in grief, we groan when people die, we groan when people disappoint us. We just have constant reminders of our sin and suffering.

It's fascinating to me that Paul says, the Spirit prays for me, the Spirit prays for you, the Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God prays for us. And then he says he prays with groanings. There are no words sometimes. And so the Spirit of God enters into our groanings and groans with us and takes our groans to God and the Father who hears those groans, interprets them, understands them, and honors them. And we emerge from the darkness with hope, a confident expectation of a glorious future.

Someday, it's pretty clear in Scripture, someday we'll have new bodies, we'll have resurrected bodies. Paul says in Philippians 3 that we'll have a glorious body like the resurrected body of Jesus. And in those new bodies, and with that new body, we will inhabit the new heaven and the new Earth, where everything will be as it should be. We'll finally and fully be in the presence of God, paradise restored, and our bodies will no longer desire to sin. They'll no longer age, and we won't groan any longer.

Now I'm finding aging to be an interesting process. That's one word for it. Trying to keep it positive here. It's interesting.

I've been one who's used my body over the years through a lot of things. And I don't know, it's kind of frustrating that you don't get faster and you don't get stronger and you don't get better after a certain age. And that varies. But at some point, everyone crosses a threshold and begins a physical decline. And I'm on it right now.

But for some, that decline comes prematurely through disease, cancer, lots of different things.

Our bodies are important to God. Read First Corinthians 6, and he says, listen, your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. That's where his Spirit lives in your body. And so you need to be careful what you do with your body. Honor your body.

Honor God with your body. Be careful. When I minister to people who are dying, I often use Second Corinthians 5, 1, 10. I recently shared it with Matt Lindbrink.

Paul says similar things to what we looked at in Romans 8. He says very plainly that while we're in this body, while we're living here, we're just not home. We're not where we're going to be if we're in Christ. He says this in Second Corinthians 5, verses 4 and 5. He says, while we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh.

But it's not that we want to die and get rid of these bodies that clothe us. Rather, we want to put on our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by life. And God Himself has prepared us for this. And as a guarantee, he has given us His Holy Spirit. This is a great perspective, and it's one that we should have if we are followers of Christ.

It gives us a perspective on difficulties and suffering. When we groan, even though the Holy Spirit lives within us as a down payment that's coming, we don't groan alone. We are aching for something better. It's a deep desire. I believe that Ecclesiastes 3:11 says that God puts eternity in our hearts, and it's there.

And so we sense that there's something more and there's something better. And we just. We want it, we ache for it. We want to be free from the limits of these bodies, free from sin, free from death. Now we have God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, as a deposit, as a guarantee of a glorious future.

We have a foretaste of our future in the beautiful moments of life. And there are so many. There are just so many wonderful things about this life. And we get a foretaste of the future in those moments.

So salvation has begun, but it's not done. It's started, but it's not complete. And so it's clear that everything is not right in the world and not right with us. And so we live between this gap of what is and what will be. I call it the gap between the real and the ideal.

And so we have this gap, and we're living in this gap. And it's in this gap that sometimes it gets very dark, really dark. And so we make a choice. In this gap, I'm going to either live with disappointment and doubt, or I'm going to live by faith in this gap. I'm either going to fill it with despair or I'm going to fill it with hope.

If we are in Christ, we choose hope. And when we choose hope, even when we're in the deepest of darkness, even when we groan, we don't groan alone. And we can have peace, joy and confidence. We choose hope. There will be days when life feels like one long groan, when the pain is just too deep for words.

But under that pain and under that ache, the Spirit of God is praying. Behind the silence, God is listening and working. And ahead of us, glory is waiting. One day, the long night will break into dawn. The

groans of today will fade in memory and will become songs of tomorrow.

Every sigh that turns into a groan will be swallowed up by life. This is our hope in waiting.

Hebrews 5, 7 and 8 says this.

While Jesus was here on earth, he offered prayers and pleadings with a loud cry and tears to the one who could rescue him from death.

And God heard his prayers. Because of his deep reverence for God, even though Jesus was God's son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered. I think Jesus groaned.

He prayed in anguish to the one who could save him. God heard but did not remove him from it. God did not remove his suffering. God did not remove his death.

But God worked in it. He worked in those things to bring redemption, to bring transformation, to bring eternal good, to bring resurrection. Resurrection follows death. And through that suffering, Jesus learned obedience. Not because he was disobedient, but because he walked all the way through our human pain, our fear, fear, our darkness, trusting the Father at every step.

Jesus had faith. Jesus had hope. So when we come to communion, we remember that our Savior knows what it feels like to cry out and hear silence. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

He knows the weight of sorrow. He knows what it means to keep trusting when it doesn't seem to make any sense.

Because Jesus entered the dark night of the soul and walked through it in love. Our darkness is never wasted. God can take what feels empty and turn it into life. He can take suffering and turn it into strength.

He can take death and make it rise to life. He turns our groans into glory. And so, as you take the bread, as you take the cup, remember, Jesus understands every weakness. He understands where you are today. And if you don't know him, he just says, please, please come.

I will accept you where you are. I love you too much to leave you there. We'll grow together. But you can come to him. He understands everything about us.

And once we're in Christ. The Spirit of God groans when we have no words.

And this morning, as we take the cup and we take the bread, we are

proclaiming the Lord's death and resurrection until he comes again. So eat and drink. Remember the one who entered our darkness to bring the light of hope to every dark place within us. Let me pray. God, thank you for the hope that we have.

Some days are so dark and some days are difficult, but life is also beautiful and wonderful as we anticipate when we'll fully and finally be in your presence, where everything will be as it should be. So as we take this bread and take this cup, we are reminded with the bread of the body of Jesus that he entered into our suffering. As we drink the cup, we're reminded of the price of our redemption, the blood of Jesus, his life being poured out for ours. Just help us God, to trust you in all things. Fill us with hope.

In Jesus name we pray.

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