

Great Expectations

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Romans 8:18–30

In the midst of suffering, God answers our prayers by his will.

Introduction

Many people question God’s goodness in the midst of suffering. Philosophical arguments to answer the question fall short but Paul presents a God who intervenes and brings hope in Romans 8:18-30. He outlines how God helps sufferers as they wait for Christ’s return. He sent the Holy Spirit and hires the perfect plan for our lives. He is doing everything possible to complete his work in us. He is always with us and fulfilling his plans for our destiny.

Creation longs for God’s glory (Romans 8:18-25).

- In Romans 8 Paul speaks of the essential work of the Holy Spirit. He expands on suffering from Romans 8:17. He explains that we live between God’s promises, Christ’s completed work on the cross and complete fulfillment. Some of God’s promises have been fulfilled; others are partially fulfilled or will be fulfilled in the new heavens and new earth.
- Several words hold Romans 8:18-30 together. “Glory” occurs at its beginning and end (Romans 8:18, 30). Both creation and Christians “groan” along with the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:21, 23, 26). They also “eagerly await” God’s coming glory (Romans 8:19, 23, 25) and “sons” are mentioned four times (Romans 8:19, 21, 23, 29).
- Paul doesn’t ignore suffering but acknowledges it by comparing it to God’s glory. Suffering pales in comparison. Everyone experiences suffering in some form. Jesus knows about suffering. It ranges from persecution to trials and other ordeals.

Your suffering is real but temporary. God has big plans for your life!

Romans 8:18–22 ESV

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. 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.

Creation groans for revelation (Romans 8:18-22).

- Paul begins with the big cosmic picture of a suffering creation. Until Christ returns, creation “eagerly awaits” with “groaning” the revelation of God’s children. Waiting is described in

negative terms from birth pangs to groaning. Creation is in a holding pattern until Christ's return to fulfill his promises.

Illustration: Every parent is familiar with the famous often repeated question on a long trip, "Are we there yet?" No matter how many times they tell their kids it takes time, the question still comes in a matter of minutes. Creation anticipates Jesus' return with that same longing.

- Creation is tied to the revelation of God's children because humans are stewards over the earth (Genesis 1:28). Instead, sin entered the world and humans tend to mistreat creation. God was forced to curse creation (Genesis 3:17-19), limiting its intended production and frustrating its potential, hoping for its renewal in the new heavens and earth.
- Creation groans with birth pains (Matthew 24:6) as it waits until God's children are redeemed and God restores creation. "Groaning" ties together creation, Christians and the Holy Spirit.
- The Bible gives prophetic promises of creation's restoration (Isaiah 11:6-9; 65:17, 25; 36:22; 1 Peter 3:16), hope when God recreates heaven and earth without evil.
- **Application:** We are responsible to steward creation well. Without going overboard, we can manage the resources God gave us to the best of our ability. We show our love for God and thankfulness in the way we treat his gift. God created the earth for our benefit. Let's preserve his wonderful gift.

Romans 8:23–25 ESV

And 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. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Children of God groan for redemption (Romans 8:23-25).

- Christians also wait with creation for Christ's return and fulfillment of promises. Paul uses the same words for both (Romans 8:19, 23). While creation awaits the revelation of God's children, God's children await redemption.
- Christians groan inwardly in expectation of fulfilled promises. Anticipation and patient endurance with hope become the pasture of every Christian.
- But God intervenes by sending the Holy Spirit to dwell in believers as the firstfruits and foretaste of our destiny. Firstfruits (Romans 8:23; 11:16; 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; James 1:18; Revelation 14:4) refers to offering our first portion to the Lord (Leviticus 23:10-11).

You're never alone. God sent the Holy Spirit to help you.

- The Holy Spirit is the firstfruits, down payment and pledge (2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:13-14; Romans 11:16) of God's promises. Firstfruits may refer to the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- We groan in sufferings, expectantly waiting for our adoption as sons. This adoption refers to the redemption of our bodies, not salvation. We are looking for the rapture of believers in Christ's return (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).
- Christians hope for the resurrection of the body at the rapture. Hope is used three times in two verses (Romans 8:24, 25). Hope is trusting in the unseen and helps us to see Pastor suffering to future glory. Patient endurance and waiting result in our reward.
- **Application:** We hope through faith in our future glory despite our present circumstances. They test our hope and faith in God's promises and plans for our life. Focus on the future and be strengthened and comforted to face your trials in victory!

God prepares us for his glory (Romans 8:26-30).

Romans 8:26–27 ESV

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.

The Holy Spirit groans in intercession (Romans 8:26-27)

- The Holy Spirit sustains our hope and redemption. Our weakness in prayer is knowing God's will for our future. We pray for what we think we need. But when we are unsure of God's will, the Holy Spirit intercedes by mediating our requests,, making sure they are within God's will. God knows what is best for us. He always answers prayer.

Illustration: Parents want to give children good things. But if their kid wants to eat candy all day long, they know that will make the child sick. They don't say no to be mean. They love and want to protect their kids from harm. God is the same way.

- Paul addresses the content of prayers and our limited perspective in our requests. The Holy Spirit's groaning in intercession is difficult to understand. Each word for "groan" means something slightly different.
- They might be connected to speaking in tongues, but it's unlikely. Ephesians 6:18 mentions praying in the Spirit but the Holy Spirit groans, not the believer. They might be inexpressible sighs like spirit-to-spirit, heartfelt communication. The Holy Spirit understands our requests and emotions (Romans 8:27; Psalm 139:23).
- God listens to the Holy Spirit's intercession and interest prayer according to his will. The Holy Spirit knows our minds and hearts, along with God's mind and will.

- **Application:** We can rely on the Holy Spirit when we don't know how to pray. He knows our hearts and desires. He mediates between our prayers and God's answers. Humbly receive God's reply because he knows what is best and is working his purposes in our lives.

Romans 8:28–30 ESV

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.

The Father predestines us (Romans 8:28-30).

- While the Holy Spirit helps us pray, God prepares us for glory through divine providence. Romans 8:28 is popular but must be understood in context. It is a promise only for those who love God. It is not a promise to get what we want.
- No situation is beyond God's ability to work his good purposes in us (Genesis 50:20). Each situation is an opportunity for holiness and godliness. Sometimes he must discipline us in our journey to become like Christ. The trials we face increase our faith and character. This promise is connected to our vibrant relationship with Jesus.
- Much debate surrounds Romans 8:29-30. Determinists (Calvinists) believe God's call is only for future Christians and is irresistible and unstoppable. Supporters of free will (Arminians) believe God's call is open to everyone and can be resisted.
- Paul spells out God's purpose for Christians throughout a process of chain reactions that build on one another. This process is from God's perspective and describes his transformation of Christians for his purposes.
 - Foreknowledge (Acts 2:23; Romans 8:29, 30; 1 Peter 1:2)
 - God's foreknowledge is deeply personal (Psalm 139) as he knows us better than we know ourselves. He begins transforming us for his glory.
 - God's perspective is infinite, outside of time. We travel only in the present and past. We have no right to question God's choices or purposes.

God's perfect plan is tailored to you and began the moment your relationship with him started.

- Predestination (Acts 4:28; Romans 8:29, 30; Ephesians 1:5, 11)
 - God's purpose, will, choosing and predestination all occur around predestination in Scripture. God personally shepherds the process making us like Jesus. Predestination is not to salvation but part of God's determination to mold every Christian into Jesus' image.
 - God created humanity in his image (Genesis 1:27). Our sin tainted his image but he is restoring it through Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3; 1

Corinthians 15:49; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 3:21). Paul spoke about exchanging God's image to worship created images (Romans 1:22-23).

- Calling (Romans 8:28, 30) – God calls us into relationship and service. He personally starts the process of restoring Christ's image in us.
- Justification – Through Jesus' death on the cross, his sacrifice makes us righteous before God, as if we never sinned. We are covered with his righteousness and blameless before God.
- Glorification – God's promises are completely fulfilled. This is our final state, dwelling with Christ in heaven for eternity.
- **Application:** God is doing everything possible to develop Christ's image in us. Trust God to lead you to his perfect destiny. Don't worry about growing in Christ and walking with him. He is behind the scenes lovingly willing and guiding us into his glorious unique purpose for us.

Conclusion

We live between God's promises and their complete fulfillment. In every trial we face our prayer requests are mediated by the Holy Spirit and God's will for our lives. He designed the perfect unique plan that fits each of us, conforming us to Jesus' image. Nothing that happens to us surprises God. Even the most tragic situations fall under his divine plan.

Are you experiencing a trial right now? The rough road has taken you to the end of your rope. God is waiting for you to call on him. The end of ourselves is the beginning of his best work. No matter how hard it gets, your destiny has been set by the King of the universe. You are in the palm of his hand and he'll never let you go. This trial is nothing compared to God's glory. Trust in him as you walk through the fire. He's not finished with you yet!