

VIII. The Holy Spirit in Biblical Perspective  
*Led by the Spirit*

“The Holy Spirit and a Believer’s Suffering”

Romans 8:18–27

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April 3, 2016 – Morning sermon

I want to set up this study where we left off and *Led By the Spirit* is our ministry focus this year. This is the eighth study of this text and there will be one more study in Romans 8. Romans 8:12–17 says [12] *So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. [13] For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. [14] For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. [15] For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” [16] The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, [17] 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.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

Some time ago we did a series on the Gospel according to James and in that writer of James says in James 1:2–3, [2] *Count it all joy, my brothers, when (not if) you meet trials of various kinds, [3] for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.* There is a great confession in Romans 5: 3–5 that says [3] *Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, [4] and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, [5] and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.* So we rejoice in our sufferings because they are at work in us, on us and through us so that we are developing the character of Christ and that is constantly undergirding our hope in Christ.

The hope in the Bible is not a wish hope. The hope in the Bible is a sure hope that informs all of life and where we’re headed to. Through my study of James, everything that can happen to an unbeliever in this sin-cursed world can happen to a believer except for God’s condemning judgment and discipline. Believers get sick, lose jobs, die, live through recessions and depressions. They have friends and relationships with disappointments except for what it says in Romans 8:1; [1] *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

This begs a question which I’d like to put at the backdrop of our study today. We realize when we become a believer we are a new creation, then how come we are not promised suffering? Instead of a battleship, why am I not on a cruise ship? I’m going to let Paul explain at least part of why we are not promised no suffering in this world. Also, what is the Holy Spirit doing while we are encountering suffering? We have already had seven studies on Romans 8:1–17 so I just want to remind you of the salient points we have already covered so that we are set up to understand Romans 8:18–27.

The first thing is that the Holy Spirit is not a second blessing in the Christian life for the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential to the Christian life. We have to be born again by the Spirit or we’re dead in our sins. This text in Romans 8 is a magisterial text on the work of the Holy Spirit in all of the Bible and that is why our theme is being led by the Spirit. That is why we’re taking

the time to examine what Paul is telling us about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in us, through us and to us. Positively Paul tells us all who are led by the Spirit, these are the sons of God. That is how you know who are the sons of God. Then Paul says it negatively when he says anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not have Christ. You can't get any plainer than that. The Holy Spirit is absolutely essential in coming to Christ, living for Christ, staying with Christ, becoming like Christ and going to meet Christ.

Secondly, we learned from the text is that as a Christian I'm never alone and I will never be alone for the Holy Spirit is living within me. Jesus says He will be with us all the days by the Spirit of Christ so I must never live as if I am on my own because I am never alone or will ever be alone.

Thirdly, we learned that the Spirit of God that the Father sent upon Christ who was with Him from the womb out of the tomb, the risen Christ sends that same Holy Spirit to us from our new birth to our of our tomb to into His presence. You have that same Holy Spirit that Christ had upon you as well.

Fourthly, we learned that if you are led by the Spirit of God, the leading of His Spirit is not only a triumphant declaration that you have a new destination for your life but it is also a celebration of a new vocation. The Spirit of God is not only leading you from death unto life, from sin to your Savior, and giving you a new destination in life as you're led by the Spirit but He is also giving you a new vocation in life. For to me to live in Christ and to die is gain (Philippians 1:21). In fact, I have now been called into His service and His family.

The last thing we learned is that the Son of God has now enlisted you in the army of God by His Spirit to do battle against His enemies, sin, death, hell, Satan and the grave. The Spirit of God has adopted you into the family of God. You are no longer an orphan of sin for you now belong to the family of God. Even more than that, you have been emancipated by the love of God. You have been set free from the penalty and power of sin. You have been set free from the slavery of fear so that you don't live in fear for perfect love cast out all fear.

Whenever you're going through this broken world with a broken body and all those consequences of suffering is that in the midst of your suffering you cry out "Abba Father" and the Holy Spirit bears witness with your spirit. Many times when we describe using the phrase "Abba Father" we see it as we're at the mountain top of spirituality and also think of it as God being our Daddy but that is not really how the text is using it. The text uses the Greek word *krazo* which is what Jesus used from the cross and what Bartimaeus did to get Jesus' attention. It is not the coo of intimacy but it is the cry from adversity. The unbeliever in the midst of a broken world will either cry out in despair or rage. The believer cries out "Abba Father" not simply in the mountain of intimacy but in the valley of adversity.

Why? It is because we are joint heirs with Christ. You not only inherit forgiveness and eternal life but you also inherit suffering which is what the text says. We suffer with Him to be glorified with Him but that doesn't mean our suffering is earning a place in heaven. Suffering marks out those in Christ who are on their way to heaven. Christ's suffering redeemed us and then He went to glory. Our suffering manifests our love for the Redeemer and it is preparing us for glory. It is part of our inheritance. It has been granted unto you not only to believe in Him but also to suffer for His sake. In that He is transforming you and preparing you for heaven. It is actually giving you a new heart for the new heavens and the new earth. He is doing all these things in your life in the midst of suffering.

Going through it is not easy. In fact He will picture it for you as groaning. There are three groanings in the midst of a broken world that will be here until Christ comes again and

brings a new heavens and a new earth. First of all there is the groaning of the creation. Secondly, is the groaning of believers. Thirdly, is the groaning of the Holy Spirit within us. Let's walk through those three groanings in the text. The first set of groanings is found in Romans 8:18–22 which is the groanings of the creation.

Romans 8:18–22 says [18] *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.* (My heart is not here but there in heaven.) [19] *For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.* (There will be suffering until all the sons of God are called to Christ.) [20] *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope [21] 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.* [22] *For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.*

We are in the midst of a creation that is groaning. It's futility and it's emptiness. We get well and then we get sick again. We get success here and failure here. There is adversity throughout creation and throughout culture. It is subjected to futility. This is not where the home of the believer is and we're being reminded of this. How long will this continue? It will be until all the believers have been saved and prepared for eternity and then this creation and its birth pangs will issue forth into a new birth of a new heavens and a new earth.

In Matthew 24 the disciples asked Jesus when the close of the age was going to be and He said it wouldn't come until the birth pangs have come. What are the birth pangs? They are war, famines, tribulation, earthquakes, cataclysmic events and this and that. These are the creation groanings and we'll be delivered from the curse of sin into a new heavens and a new earth. So the creation is groaning.

I really appreciate my professor at Westminster who put me onto this years ago. One of the first paraphrases of the Bible was called the Philips Translation. It was pretty good but the best paraphrasing it did was right in this passage. This word groaning is tough to translate and I love the way Philips tries to get it across to us. It says the 'whole creation is standing on its tip toes straining to see where it's going.'

This past week I did a historical tour with some people where we get insights while we're on sight about life and we were at Arlington, Virginia at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. It was spring break so it seemed like everybody was there. When we went to the changing of the guard I was watching those who were somewhat more challenged as they were up on their tiptoes straining their necks to see the picture. That is the picture of creation where it is standing on its tiptoes longing to see the new heavens and the new earth where there is no pain or sorrow and death has been banished. There is no sin and no consequences of sin and not even the ability to sin in that glorious new heavens and new earth.

That is not the only groaning that is going on for Paul goes to a second groaning and that's the groaning of the believer in a broken world. Romans 8:22–25 says [22] *For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.* [23] *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.* [24] *For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?* [25] *But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

The Holy Spirit is in you in this body that is groaning. If yours is not it will. My does, for I don't jump out of bed anymore. I take about 15 minutes to reintroduce my bones to each other and then I try to somehow get out of bed at that moment. The Holy Spirit is within us and

He is causing us to stand on our tiptoes. Every time there is brokenness and suffering in our body inwardly we're straining to see the new body for the new heavens and the new earth. We're looking and longing for it. Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Christ our Lord.

For some clarity on this I'd like to look at I Corinthians 15 where the Apostle Paul is rebuking the church at Corinth because it didn't believe in the resurrection and the crucial nature of it. I Corinthians 15:42–48 says [42] *So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. [43] It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. [44] It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. [45] Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. [46] But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. [47] The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. [48] As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. [49] Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.*

Paul is telling us this body is groaning and the Holy Spirit is causing that groaning within us. As we see this body coming apart and coming to pieces groaning there are just not enough surgeries and vitamins to fix it. You are living a life in which gravity is going to win. Just go look in the mirror. Everything is sagging and it will win all the way to six feet under but if you're in Christ that is part of the process of sowing the perishable to reach the imperishable, to sow the natural to resurrect the spiritual. We see this when Jesus raises Lazarus from the grave for when Lazarus came out they had to take off the grave clothes. When Jesus came out of the grave no one had to undue the grave clothes. For Lazarus that old body was raised and he had to die again but we'll have a body like Jesus that came up out of the grave, out of the clothes, through the grave clothes, that spiritual body that God has created for His people. And the Holy Spirit is causing us to stand on our tiptoes.

Who will deliver me from this body of death? It is Christ the Lord of glory. So the creation is groaning and will keep groaning until all of the redeemed is brought to Christ and we are groaning and will keep groaning and suffering until Christ is through transforming, growing and preparing us for our home to come as we inherit these sufferings to grow in grace. So in light of this groaning for this new body how should we live now?

I Corinthians 15:50–58 says [50] *I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. [51] Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, [52] in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. [53] For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. [54] When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:*

*"Death is swallowed up in victory."*

[55] *"O death, where is your victory?*

*O death, where is your sting?"*

[56] *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. [57] But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (So how do I live on the way*

through this suffering, straining to look to that which is to come in that new body for a new heavens and a new earth?)

*[58] Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

This is not all there is but there is something for me to do until I get where all there is in Him and I will be with Him. So I am groaning and standing on my tiptoes looking forward to that just as the creation is groaning. There is a third groaning which we see also in Romans 8. So here we are with our hope informing us in the sufferings of this age and our hope is not this world. Our hope is in what the Lord has purchased for us – a new heavens, a new earth and a new body. That hope is moving us forward and that is because the Holy Spirit is causing us to strain and look forward. What else does He say about the Holy Spirit?

Romans 8:26–27 says *[26] 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. [27] 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.* That is the groaning of the Holy Spirit. This idea of groaning and standing on tiptoes is a really hard translation and now we hear of groanings too deep for words. Some people think this is about speaking in tongues but it isn't for there are no words here. This is groanings of the Spirit that is too deep to be uttered.

I had the privilege to raise three children and it's just a treasure chest of illustrations for sermons but I'm always very careful not to embarrass them. My third child I don't think spoke until she was about 6 years of age. She hasn't quit since but before then she would just kind of groan. I would ask her what she wanted and her brother or sister would answer for her. How would they know what she wanted if she never spoke? They would translate for her for the first five years of her life.

The Holy Spirit is translating for you before the Father and through the Son in groanings too deep to be uttered. The Holy Spirit is interceding for your weaknesses. Now what he is giving you here is a principle. The Holy Spirit is in you groaning to deliver you in your weaknesses. Paul says the good that I would do I don't do but the Holy Spirit doesn't give up on you. He keeps working.

Have you ever met people who don't have any patience with anyone who just doesn't get it right or they don't suffer fools well? Aren't you glad the Holy Spirit suffers you well? When I pray I don't pray as I ought to pray. When I'm witnessing I falter. I may get silent when I ought to speak or I speak when I ought to be silent. I may use words I shouldn't use or I'm not being led by the Spirit and I'm doing it in the flesh. The Holy Spirit doesn't give up for He takes hold and helps us in our weaknesses.

Then he uses an illustration. There is probably nothing more important to the Christian than to pray rightly and we don't. We're still learning to pray. I have never yet preached a series on pray that somebody says 'I'm not sure why you're preaching that Pastor because I have that.' We are always wanting to be taught to pray but here's the good news. You and I ought to learn how to pray. You pray about anything and everything. Philippians 4:6–7 says *[6] do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. [7] And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

As I pray for anything and everything, as far as I know I'm shaping this prayer by the revealed will of God but I know I'm inadequate, incompetent and unable yet I am grateful because the Holy Spirit isn't dependent on me getting it right for He is at work getting me right.

When I falter it doesn't stop Him in me or working through me and that is what He is doing with you. There is probably no area that we're more grateful than in our prayer life.

I am very simple on this. Here I am praying about anything and everything and I'm trying to shape it according to God's will. I know I'm going to falter so I always add at the end of my prayer, 'not my will be done but Your will be done.' That is my cover and I really mean it. I have made my will known but now Your will needs to be done. I've tried to be shaped by Your revealed will but You have a secret will and the secret will belongs to the Lord our God so not my will be done but Your will be done. I'm trying to follow Jesus. Then I'm grateful when I finish that, that the Holy Spirit takes it to groanings too deep to be uttered. The Spirit takes it to Jesus who ever lives to intercede for us so by the time it gets to the Father that is a great prayer. It didn't start off too good with me, perhaps, but it ends as a great prayer as Jesus takes it to the Father.

The Spirit of God is interceding for us and if He intercedes in your prayer life He'll intercede in your marriage life, your family life, your parenting, as an employee to honor Christ, an employer to honor Christ and how to live in a culture that is consciously codifying depravity. How do we do this for Christ because we feel inadequate and weak? He is with us in our weaknesses and He will sustain us, uphold us and will keep working patiently with us. There are times we just can hardly get anything out but it doesn't stop Him.

I took a group of people to Tuskegee to see two of my heroes – George Washington Carver and Booker T. Washington. I began to teach them about one part of Carver's life that not many people know about and that was his heart for those who were suffering with polio. He would try to create all kinds of things to help these people. One of the things he created helped a President by the name of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and they ended up being good friends because of it for FDR suffered with polio and its effects.

One of the things Carver addressed was the matter of the iron lung which they have one on display there at Tuskegee. As I understand there are only two of those working in the US and I happen to know one of the guys, at least up until a couple of years ago, who lives in that iron lung but they will pull him out periodically. When they do he cannot speak for he can only groan. His wife of 30 years can tell you exactly what he is saying. So we groan and the Holy Spirit is groaning for us and groaning to the Father on our behalf so that we have this prayer life that is cut loose.

I want to close with these three takeaways. The first takeaway is the groanings of this world are a reminder of God's redemptive patience and persistence. Why is this world groaning? It is because God has brought the judgment of sin and through the judgment of sin He is sending a Redeemer to save us. He will not stop this groaning world until He has redeemed all of His sons from their sins to Himself. When is Jesus coming back? There is a day that will trigger the Day and that 'a day' is when all of the redeemed have been saved and shaped in this world of suffering by the power of God's grace and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Then that last trumpet will sound and then Jesus comes and we will have the glories of a new heavens and a new earth but until then He is doing His work as He is patient with us. What does the Bible say about Jesus? It says He learned obedience through the things He suffered. What is happening to us? By the Spirit of God we are learning obedience in our sufferings.

The second takeaway is our inadequacies and frailties in this life do not become an occasion of frustration for the Holy Spirit but an occasion of intercession. I am just amazed at the patience of God with me because He ought to be impatient with me because I just can't seem to get it right. In some things I have this victory and then in this other one I keep taking three

steps back but God is patient and He keeps working with us to grow us in the midst of this. In the sufferings as God is shaping you with patience and persistence, our frailties don't become an occasion for His frustration but they become an occasion for His intercession for us.

He tells us two things. One is He will never let come upon you what you are not able to bear and with it the way of escape. His presence will bring you through. Romans 8:35–39 says [35] *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?* [36] *As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."*

[37] *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.* [38] *For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,* [39] *nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

The third takeaway is the Spirit-filled Christian does not view the age (between the victory of Christ and the coming of Christ) to come with fascination for this present age but Christians views this age with anticipation of the age to come. Paul said he didn't believe the sufferings of this age were worth comparing to the glories of the age to come.

Have you ever heard someone say 'he is so heavenly minded he is of no earthly good'? I want to challenge that because I don't think you are earthly good until you get heavenly minded. If you think your best life is all here and now you will walk around as a Christian discouraged the rest of your life. The best for a Christian is yet to come and what is left for me here is to be faithful to Christ, steadfast and immovable by His grace as He grows me. I look forward to the age to come. This isn't my home. I want a green card here. I'm an alien and a sojourner here. I have work to do for the Kingdom for I am an ambassador and I will do all that God has called me to do. I praise Him for the joys of serving Him in this world and glorifying Him but my hope is not here. My hope is there where He is who is preparing a place for me so that where He is I may be also. So I want to stay fixed on Him and the age to come and ask Him to make me faithful here.

I served the Lord in Charlotte, North Carolina before I came here and there was a large group of missionaries who came and shared with me a story about another missionary. This missionary had served the Lord for many years and never came back to America until he had a terminal disease as the end of his life was approaching. So his kids brought him back home to take care of him. Eventually he was bed ridden and they took him to the hospital. The daughter of the missionary went to her pastor and said "My father is not a member here but I am a member as you know and he has served his church so faithfully. His church is over in Africa and his pastor can't come so could you please be his pastor in his last days?" The pastor responded, "It would be my delight and privilege."

The pastor went to visit him in the hospital. He saw him laying on the bed and there was a chair already there beside the bed so the pastor went over and sat on it, opened the Scriptures, talked and prayed with him. Then the pastor got up to leave and said "I want to thank you for this time. I'll be back in a couple of days and please know I'll continue to pray for you." As the pastor got up, absent-mindedly he grabbed the chair and went to push it back against the wall and the missionary said "Please don't move that chair. Bring it back and place it there. I'm a simple man. I want to live by faith with my eyes fixed on Jesus and I am in the midst of suffering. I need that chair there just to remind me that He is with me. I just want to know He is there and it helps me." So the pastor put the chair back where it was.

The daughter called the pastor to thank him for visiting her father and that there was no need for the pastor to go back and visit for He had already went to be with the Lord. She told the pastor “They found him this morning.” The pastor said “I’m so sorry. I know this is difficult and I’m available for you too but I want you to know it was my privilege to visit your dad for I received much more from him than he possibly received from me. I prayed that his home going would be easy, so did he die peacefully?” She said “We don’t know but we think so for he died during the night. The nurses found him this morning but I can tell you something that you might find interesting. When they found him he wasn’t in his bed. He was on his knees with his face on a chair.” Fixed on Jesus.

The sufferings of this world are in the hands of God’s providence to shape us and call us and they are nothing compared to when we see Him. We shall behold Him. I’m so grateful for all that I’ll see and I’ll that I look forward to seeing but I want to see Him who died for me. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Let the Holy Spirit speak to your heart. Perhaps today as you live in this broken world God has been moving on your heart. Is there an answer to the brokenness of sin? You have heard of a Savior who went to the cross and died for you. He will send His Holy Spirit and you will be more than a conqueror where even the sufferings will become a part of the tapestries of His grace and you’d like to come to Him. Pray right now, ‘Lord Jesus I am a sinner and You are the King and Savior of sinners. Lord Jesus I turn from my sins and put my trust in You.’ If you’d like to pray with someone please call us at (205) 776-5200. It would be my privilege to talk with you and pray with you. Father, I now ask that Your people will walk in the triumph of Christ in a world that is groaning to be delivered in bodies that are groaning to be delivered and with the Holy Spirit who is groaning to deliver us, keep us, grow us and intercede for us. Therefore we do not count the sufferings of this life as anything compared to the glory to be revealed through Christ our Lord, Amen.

### Power Point

#### LIFE TAKEAWAYS

The Spirit-filled Christian knows the groaning’s of this world are a reminder God’s redemptive plan and persistence.

The Spirit-filled Christian knows the inadequacies and frailties in life do not become an occasion of frustration for the Holy Spirit but an occasion of effective intercession.

The Spirit-filled Christian does not view the age to come with fascination for this present age, but views this age with anticipation of the age to come.