



GROANING IN THE GRIP OF WINTER

ROMANS 8:23-27

As we follow Christ and pursue godliness in the midst of this ungodly world, we look ahead, longing for the day our groaning will become glory. We do so with the certainty of that coming day and the assurance of the Holy Spirit's intercession.

C. S. Lewis wrote a classic series of children's stories that illustrate biblical truths. The first volume is entitled *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.¹ The land of Narnia is under the control of the wicked witch who keeps it perpetually bound to winter. It is all icicles and freezing temperatures year-round. In this land, her subjects live unhappy lives, and all of nature around her suffers from this unending winter. Under her reign, springtime will never come.

But Aslan the lion comes forward, eventually offering himself to the witch to be put to death on behalf of one of her prisoners. She agrees, and her kingdom seems to triumph; but then Aslan rises from the dead and releases the witch's grip on the land. Immediately the snow and ice begin to melt, rivers begin flowing, and flowers begin blooming—springtime has returned to the land of Narnia.

This is a wonderful analogy of what the apostle Paul has revealed to us in Scripture about the fallen world suffering because of sin. Mankind is a fallen race, and even creation,

Paul wrote in Romans chapter 8, is groaning for the day of redemption.

Now as we sail back into Romans 8, Paul tells us that we are also groaning with a deep longing inside of us. He explains in verse 23:

Not only the creation [is groaning], 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.

We all have this sense that things are not perfect, that life is not all it could be or should be. Paul explains our longing here. He says we are effectively groaning for three fulfillments to take place.

First, we are waiting for the *final stage of our inheritance*. Verse 23 says, we “have the firstfruits of the Spirit.” In other words, we are experiencing the first part of our inheritance, the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, the be-

lieving Israelite would take some of the first of his harvest to the priest. It was a gift to God and symbolized that there was more to come, for God's glory.

Paul reverses that Old Testament practice and tells us that *God* gives us the Firstfruits, which is the Holy Spirit. And His presence is a signal that there is more to come. You could say it this way: the Holy Spirit is the down-payment on our eternal inheritance as the bride of Christ. There is more to come when we reach heaven. And we long for that future fulfillment to take place.

Second, Paul says that we are also inwardly groaning for the *final stage of our adoption*. He writes, "We wait eagerly for adoption as sons" (verse 23). We have already talked about Roman adoption procedures, which not only brought a child into a new family but also bestowed on that child the responsibilities and privileges of a mature, adult son who could represent the family name and carry on the family business.

Paul is referring here to that future when we will reign with Christ. And beloved, that is a lot of responsibility as well as an amazing, royal privilege in His coming kingdom.

There is nothing wrong with wanting that privilege—it happens to be a part of your inheritance. It is proper to long for that day when everything is made right under the reign of Christ our King, and we, the redeemed, are reigning at His side.

Third, Paul writes that, as believers, we groan for the *final stages of our redemption*—that is, "the redemption of our bodies." There is a day coming, beloved, when God will clothe your mortal body with immortality. You are getting a new body—and it is going to last forever.

Right now, your knees might need replacing, and your back might be hurting, and you would rather sit down than stand up. Well, God never designed your body to last very long. That is because He has a new one in store for you where there is no more sinful flesh, no more pain or suffering.

Let me tell you, the older I get, the more I look forward to—you might even say I am groaning for—my new, glorified, perfected, sinless, immortal body.

In the meantime, we need to make sure to groan for all of this in the right way. And Paul actually tells us how to groan correctly. He says we are to groan with the assurance of hope. Here is what he writes:

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.

(verses 24-25)

Paul is saying here that we cannot see heaven yet, but we are assured of heaven because of our faith in Christ and our salvation; so, we wait with patience and expectation.

WE ARE ASSURED OF HEAVEN
BECAUSE OF OUR FAITH IN
CHRIST.

Our groaning is not hopelessness; it is hopefulness. It is like your children in the back seat of the car on their way to Grandma and Grandpa's house, asking over and over again, "Are we there yet?" They are filled with hope,

not because they doubt they will make it, but because they cannot wait to get there. This is groaning with hopeful anticipation—“Are we there yet?”

I remember that summer trip my three brothers and I used to make with our missionary parents—back to Minnesota to see our grandparents and many of our cousins. It took twenty-four hours from Virginia to Minnesota, and every summer we did it nonstop.

I used to think my parents drove through the night because they were just as excited as we were. I would learn later that it was because they did not have money for a hotel along the way. We used to stop at the same two city parks along the way to eat sandwiches from the cooler. I thought that was because they just liked those two parks. Well, it was because they did not have money for restaurants either.

Of course, I would not trade those memories today. But I do remember it was long and tedious, and it seemed to take forever.

Just as children need to be encouraged along the way, especially when the journey is long and tedious, so the Christian’s journey home is long and tiresome at times. We need help. We need wisdom, perspective, and patience as we experience suffering and pain along the way.

**WE NEED WISDOM,
PERSPECTIVE, AND PATIENCE
AS WE EXPERIENCE
SUFFERING AND PAIN.**

And God has provided help for us along the journey. Note Paul’s words here in verse 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.

Sometimes we do not even know how to pray or we cannot find the words. But here is some amazing news: We have a traveling companion called the Holy Spirit who sometimes just takes over and translates our groaning into words. Imagine that! The Holy Spirit is interceding for us right now—He is praying for us today.

**THE HOLY SPIRIT IS
INTERCEDING FOR US RIGHT
NOW.**

And how does the Spirit pray for us? Paul tells us here in verse 26: “The Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”

What are you agonizing over? It is on His prayer list for you. What are you happy about? That is on His list of praises. He personally intercedes for you.

And one day, beloved, this season of groaning will be over. The grip of winter will be forever released—it will be springtime in heaven.

I like that old chorus that goes like this:

It will be worth it all when we see Jesus,
Life’s trials will seem so small when we see
Christ;
One glimpse of His dear face, all sorrow will
erase,
So bravely run the race till we see Christ.²

Reflect on your own experiences of longing for something better in life. In what ways have you felt that life is not all it could or should be, and how does this relate to the idea of groaning for a future fulfillment?

Consider the concept of hope in Christian faith. How does your assurance of hope in Christ impact the way you view the future and endure present difficulties?



Explore the role of the Holy Spirit in interceding for believers. How does the knowledge that the Spirit prays for you, especially in moments when you don't know how to pray, bring comfort and assurance?

Take time to consider your current concerns and joys in life. How does it feel to know that the Spirit is interceding for you with groanings too deep for words in both your struggles and moments of happiness?

¹*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* was the first of the novels written by C. S. Lewis, however, *The Magicians Nephew* is the first chronological volume in the series.

²Esther K. Rusthoy, "When We See Christ." Copyright © 1941 New Spring Publishing Inc. (ASCAP) (adm. at CapitolCMGPublishing.com) All rights reserved. Used by permission.

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