

**SAFE AND SECURE
HOPE AND PATIENCE****Romans 8:18-25**

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. 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.

In the first 17 verses of Romans 8, we have been seeing that Paul has an amazing announcement – amazing good news for everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ. The taproot, the massive root underneath all insecurity is severed in Jesus Christ. The root of insecurity is condemnation, and Paul begins this glorious chapter with this great announcement: **There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.** If you trust in Christ, you receive the forgiveness of sin, the removal of judgment -- past, present and future. You receive the Spirit of God in your life. The Holy Spirit comes in, announcing to you internally, bearing witness with your spirit that you are forgiven and there is no condemnation. **You are completely secure in Jesus.**

But also, the Spirit of God is the Spirit of adoption. The Spirit comes in, saying to you: **You belong to God. He loves you. He gave his Son for you. You are in store for an amazing inheritance. You are a co-heir with Jesus. Nothing you've done in your past, nothing you experience in your present circumstances, and nothing you fear in the future will keep you from that.** God's love is spread abroad (to borrow a phrase from Romans 5) in your heart. This is the security that belongs to us as Christians.

Now, when Paul ends this section in verse 17, he says, "...and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ (listen to this), provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him." He ends this whole announcement saying, **"The root of your insecurity has been**

cut off. God is in you. The Spirit of God is living within you. There is no condemnation.” He has been telling us how to walk in agreement with the Spirit of God, then he ends that section with this, which if I really am honest, sounds like a contradiction. It sounds like an exception. Just one little clause: **“except you have to suffer with Jesus.”**

There is this question: “Okay, if I am a child of God, if I am a daughter or son of God, and all of my sin has been paid for, and I’ve been set free, and I’m loved by God, and God is all-powerful, and God is good, then why would anything ever go bad for me? Why would I be called on to suffer?”

In reality, suffering feels very much like the opposite of verses 1-17. It feels like I’m being judged. It feels like I’m under condemnation. It feels like I’m paying for something. It feels like God doesn’t love me. **When we really experience true loss, there is this question: God, where are you?** So Paul takes that up in verses 18-25 to help us respond, to help us understand, to help us comprehend and act in light of the fact that we live in a broken world. Allow me, if you would, to try to draw out this application before we even jump in.

Some of you are here today and you are experiencing suffering. You are experiencing either physical or personal or relational suffering. And some of you are here saying, “I’m not. Maybe I will, maybe I have.” But also, we just live in a broken world. Things do not go easily. Things are a mess sometimes, and this passage of scripture helps us to know what to do in a broken world. **How do we live in light of suffering and how do we deal with brokenness?**

I’m going to give you two simple points today, really simple. No notes on the screen, just two points I want you to take away with you today:

I. Perspective.

II. Practice.

I. Perspective.

Let me summarize for you what I believe Paul tells us here about the perspective we have toward suffering. **Suffering is painful, but like the pain of childbirth.** In fact, he tells us in this passage that creation has been made subject to (and this is the word he uses) “futility.” Do you ever feel like this

is just futile? It just doesn't work. Sometimes it's the things that are most precious to us that just don't work. Sometimes life is very difficult.

Paul says creation has been made subject to this sense of frustration, this sense of futility, by God. Then he adds these two words: **"in hope."** Because this pain that we experience in life, whether it's the pain of suffering or the general frustration of a world that doesn't always work, doesn't always cooperate -- it's like childbirth. We are moving toward a time when all of creation will be restored, all of creation will be made new. There will be a new heaven and a new earth. And not only is creation moving toward this glorious restoration, but everyone who trusts in Christ will be restored and made new and receive a new body. That will be the culminating moment: You will get a new body.

So Paul is saying you will see glory. Glory will be revealed to you. But listen very carefully: **Glory will be revealed in you and through you, and you will become visible as a child of God, as a son of God, as a daughter of God. So everything that happens now is fit into this perspective of childbirth.** These are labor pains that we are experiencing in this life.

He says that "...we know that all of creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only 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." This is Paul's summary of perspective. The perspective is that it's childbirth. It's giving birth to the purposes, the life, the eternal restoration of God.

This is how he starts this section in verse 18: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed..." When we take all of the junk of this life and compare it to what's to come in its finality, in its glorification, it just doesn't compare. It's as if Paul is saying, "Uh, what suffering?"

II. Practice.

The question that comes to mind for me is that if the perspective is that the pain is the pain of childbirth, it's the pain that we experience in a broken world because God is restoring everything -- it's leading to life, it's leading to the kingdom of God in its glory, in its fullness, well, what do I do? What do I do now?

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I had the privilege of being in the birth room four times. Four times my beautiful wife gave birth, and I was pretty much useless all four times. I think I became more helpful. I definitely had a failing grade the first time and the second time. I may have achieved a C- by birth #4. There is a sense of helplessness. This woman that I love with all my heart is in great pain and I feel helpless in that moment.

But when we talk about those experiences, ah, what joy fills us, right? Because we have amazing children that came out of that experience. Well done, babe. It was worth the pain, even though you did all the work. I guess I'm trying to say slowly that there was a sense of total awkwardness for me. I just didn't know how to help. I think as I began to experience it, I got some idea that there were severe limitations to what I really could do and how to be helpful as a husband. But the Christian is struggling with what to do! Everything is leaning toward this great, glorious restoration. Do I just wait? Do I just do nothing? So here is a great takeaway for today: **Hope and Patience.**

I want to spend a little time this morning talking about what that looks like and how that is to characterize our practice. It's what people are to see when they see us as children of God: hopeful, full of hope, and (this is a tough one) patient. That's how he ends. That's kind of his takeaway from the passage. "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."

He is saying that this is to flavor our daily practice, but he has just said something to us in the previous verse, verse 23. We looked at it a minute ago, but let me draw our attention back to that verse. For he says, "...not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have (here it is) the firstfruits of the Spirit..." "The firstfruits of the Spirit." The Spirit of God is living and residing within us, and he is manifesting the presence of God, the love of God. He is bringing the kingdom of God.

Think of Matthew 12:28. In Matthew 12, Jesus is ministering. He is setting people free and the religious leaders of his day are just spitting mad. They are angry and they are accusing Jesus of living and walking in the power of the devil because he has this power over evil. And Jesus makes this announcement. I think it's verse 28 of Matthew 12. He says, "Listen, if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, you know that the kingdom of God has come upon you. You know that the kingdom has come near."

You see, the Spirit of God was ministering through Jesus. Jesus was ministering in the power of the Spirit. And when he ascended in Acts chapter 2, he poured out his Holy Spirit on the Church and

said, “Now you are going to go with the Spirit of God in you, ministering in the power of the Holy Spirit.”

To put all this together, Jesus taught us to pray: “Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. **Thy kingdom come...**” So the Christian – what are we doing now? – **in hope and patience with the Spirit of God in us, we are praying for God to bring his reign, his rule, his goodness, conquering evil.** We experience it now in significant ways, in powerful ways, where God is expressing his love to us and through us to other people, but we don’t experience it in finality, in perfection, until he comes again.

For example, I’m just so grateful -- I have a back problem and I bet 15 people came to me today. They heard that I was traveling all week at a conference in London. I’ll tell you about that in just a minute. I threw out my back right before I went and I thought, “Wow, the last thing I want to do is sit on a plane.” I bet 15 people came to me today and said, “How is your back?” Amazingly, my back is better today than it was when I left. I’m grateful for that, and thank you for your prayers.

Now, here’s the thing. I think God just gave me mercy for this old, broken-down body, which is kind of limping through. I think he answers prayer. He gives us grace. But just in case you’re looking and wondering, this is not the final product. I’m grateful for it. My wife thinks it’s beautiful, handsome, but in finality and perfection, yet to come.

This is just a simple paradigm for us, and if you’re a Christian, gather this. **Believe God to bring his kingdom.** Okay? **And walk through it in hope and patience, because it’s going to be imperfect.** It’s not going to be in finality in this life. It’s going to require patience. It’s going to require prayer. Yet God is in us, helping us to understand. And when we lose the big battles, when we lose someone we love, when we die ourselves, when we come to that river, to cross it and to enter in, we trust God for grace. That’s the manifestation of the kingdom. **He is saying, “I have a redemptive purpose in what you’re going through. I’m going to be there with you and I’m going to walk through it with you. And one day your birth pains, along with all of creation, will result in my perfect restoration.”**

I was in London for the past seven days. I flew out last Saturday, came back, and landed last night in Miami. What an amazing experience I had. I went to a conference on Alpha at Trinity Brompton Church in London. I was in South Kensington, a part of London. I’m not so sure, but I think it was a nicer part of London. About a block from the hotel where I stayed there was a Maserati dealership,

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then on another block there was some car that I couldn't begin to imagine how much it cost. So I like South Kensington. If you go to London, I recommend it.

I had this experience, guys. Alpha is an 11-week discipleship program that introduces Jesus and spiritual basics to people. On the first night of this launch, 750 people lined up outside the church -- unchurched people who don't know the Lord, to get in -- in London, in unchurched, postmodern, post-Christian London. It was an *amazing* experience. This was after going through three days of being equipped and educated on what they are doing.

Here was the theme, over and over and over again. It was: This is not a method. This is not a program. It is completely designed so that if God doesn't show up, it won't work. I want to tell you that we spent so much time in prayer -- praying for one another, receiving prayer, praying about what God would do at our various churches -- seeing how everything they did was experienced through prayer. It was living out the conviction that we are seeing here.

The Spirit of God is in you. Creation is broken. You can't just reform it. You can't just fix it with plans. We plan well. We work hard. We do our best. But we need the Spirit of God, right? So we pray. We pray and we believe that God answers and moves as we pray. It's what God has called us to.

This church building, friends... I had a dear brother, a very close friend, come to me not too long ago, saying, "Brian, I'm not so sure that the church should own a shopping center and be a part of business. You have these tenants who pay rent to the church." He was questioning if this model really pleased the Lord and if it was really biblical. He is a sweet brother, a dear friend who came in a beautiful spirit. I really wanted to come away from that conversation making sure the Lord wasn't challenging me on something. But I want to tell you that I see God doing a beautiful work of restoration in North Lauderdale, and he's doing it right here, on the corner of Kimberly and Rock Island.

To tell you a little bit about this, I think it illustrates hope and patience. It won't be long that it will be 20 years that we've been here. A few years before we bought this property, a gentleman bought it off the tax rolls for \$1 million. It was a wreck. It was in terrible shape. Many of you live here in the area and you remember. We bought it for \$2.9 million and began the long process of trying to restore it. Just miracle after miracle, really, of God helping us. Just recently someone gave us an

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informal verbal offer (I don't know how serious it was) of \$10.5 million for this property. That's encouraging, right?

Here's what I want you to see in that. I don't know how serious the offer was. I just personally believe that God has planted us here. Can you see the picture of a depleted, empty retail center in an area that was teetering on decline? Then being able to come in and see it restored and see tenants move in. Then over the years see the sustainability of different tenants coming in, more viable tenants, seeing the façade getting redone -- one thing after another. If you were here when we redid the outside...literally the front roof and the front of the building were falling off. We were here for years like that. We brought a project manager and said, "What would it take to redo this?" He said, probably a million dollars. I said, "I have faith, but I don't think we're going to raise a million dollars. But let's try." So we took up an offering of about \$75,000. God knew we needed help so he sent a hurricane. We got an \$800,000 hurricane claim and we redid the front of our shopping center. Hope and patience.

God is all about the work of restoring his creation. This earth belongs to God. He subjected it because the crown of his creation rejected him and sinned against him. And he will restore it. He has given his Son and shed the blood of his Son to redeem this world. You, as a follower of Jesus, will be a part of that. It will be revealed to you. It will be revealed in you. It will be revealed through you. And God says, "Will you take up this prayer: Thy kingdom come?" I'm going to follow you and I'm going to believe that in London, in a city that is at the center of western civilization, that has boasted in its atheism, that you will save the lost and build the Church, and that hundreds of people will line up outside of an ancient church building that was dead for years, to say, "Tell me about Jesus." Yeah -- it's worth celebrating. I believe that you will take an empty, broken-down shopping center and bring life to it again, allow a church to find a home here and make it a blessing to the community, because you are redeeming your creation.

May God give us a vision. Friends, I don't know why sometimes it's so hard, but we live by faith. Right now we are wanting to improve our screens in here. We are wanting to redo the foyer. The bathrooms need to be redone. If you're brand new here, the bathrooms are not a reflection of who we are. Maybe they are. They're clean, but old and broken. I'm sorry, that's not a reflection of anyone but myself, maybe. So your elders are praying, "Lord, how do we do this? We are praying because there is a tension between this facility being a picture of what you are doing, it's a tool, but it's not everything. It's the Spirit of God, right? It is God bringing restoration.

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I don't know why sometimes it's very hard. Some of you have adopted. Some of you have fostered. Some of you have been through heartache in that area. It shouldn't be difficult to find a child who is not in a home and just open your home, right? It's difficult! It's painful. You've been through it. My wife and I have been through the process of trying to overcome obstacles. In our case, we can look back and say it's a success story, but there are others who say, "I don't know. It's just been hard!"

While I was in London, there was a situation our elders were trying to deal with, that one of our families is dealing with. We are praying through how to help someone in the foster care system that's connected to us. We believe God will help. **But I want to call you, church, to this: We want to be about being a father to the fatherless, because this is the heart of God. This is the kingdom of God coming. This is what we pray for. And we will persevere in hope and patience. God will win.**

We are praying to end the dynamic of children being in foster care without a home in this county. We are looking for the day when every single child in foster care has a home, because it's the heart of God. It's the kingdom of God. This brokenness in the family is an expression of the futility and our efforts in pain to take that and to see God bring restoration and redemption while there are birth pains.

You can apply this in so many ways to your situation. You want to have children, you're not having children. You want to adopt, you've been blocked. You've fostered, but it broke down in the process. We believe that God is in this. We believe that we are to pray for God to work, because God's Spirit is in us and because he will restore.

I want to end by going to Romans 5, if you will allow me. Just flip back. This is the passage that begins this section. If we could go to Romans 5, verse 1. I think Paul in Romans 8 in particular (where we are right now) is building on what he said and what he summarized in these verses. Romans 5:1: "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." If you have not trusted in Jesus Christ, trust him and you will have peace with God. That's the promise of scripture. Condemnation, judgment, damnation – all removed through trust in Jesus. Your relationship with God will be restored.

Not only that, "Through him (through Jesus) we have also obtained access by faith..." You can actually come into the presence of God, "...into this grace in which we stand..." When you come into God's presence, you will stand in a place of grace. You will stand in a place of God's favor.

Christian: Jesus has secured for you peace with the Father and a place of acceptance and favor with God; not because of what you've done, but because of what Jesus has done in your place.

Receive that by faith. “Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand...” And listen to this: “...and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” **That is our condition. We are full of joy. God has filled us with hope! We are full of belief! We are full of expectation that God is going to redeem this relationship.** He is going to bring emotional fulfillment. He is going to redeem that relationship with his broken child and the broken relationship with the child. On and on and on, where we are full of hope and we are rejoicing because God has promised that his glory is going to be made known to us, in us, and through us.

So this is what he says. This is similar to the hope and patience. “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope...” There is a chain here. **He says that in the midst of suffering we rejoice.** Suffering provides an opportunity to endure, to persevere. Perseverance creates character, and character creates hope. Do you see the chain? Four things: suffering, endurance, character, hope.

You can work it backwards. I'm out of hope. I want to give up. I want to quit. I want to quit on this _____ (you fill in the blank). That is revealing in me a lack of Christ-like character, a lack of the strength of Christ and the goodness of Christ, which goes back to perseverance, back to suffering. So God brings suffering into my life, or allows it, so that I'll endure, so that character will grow, and so that the demeanor of my life will be one that expresses hope and confidence in God.

Some of you remember years ago that my wife and I were on a glorious vacation. We were at a really nice restaurant with some friends and there was a waitress. I told this story when we came back from this vacation. She had some Greek words tattooed to her neck. I didn't want to stare and I couldn't really tell what they were. The table had told her that I was a pastor, so I said, “Is that Greek? What are those words on your neck? Where are they from?” She gave me these four words here of suffering, character, endurance, and hope. But she didn't use the English Standard Version of the Bible. She used some other version and they were different words, but they were those meanings. She looked at me and said, “You're a pastor. Tell me where they're from.” I shocked her, everyone at the table, and myself when I said, “Well, those are from Romans 5.” She was like, “You *are* a pastor!”

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Now this little story makes me look better than I am, which I'm okay with generally. But I tried in the next minute to say, "Listen, if you stop there in Romans 5, you've missed Paul's point." **You will not get hope just from enduring. You will not get hope unless your relationship with God is restored. You will not get hope unless you have peace with God and God's favor on your life.**

Here is how he ends. This is where he goes. He says, "Hope does not put us to shame..." There is a hope that disgraces you. There is a foolhardy hope, but that's not the kind of hope that characterizes us as children of God. Our hope doesn't put us to shame - listen - "...because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." Does that not sound like Romans 8?

The Holy Spirit is within us saying, "You can step out. You can do foster care. You can share with your neighbor. You can go to worship and experience me as you participate in worship. You can do this." And yeah, as soon as you try to step out, the enemy is there saying, "Yes, but they'll disappoint you. They'll this. They'll that. You've been hurt. Be careful." **And God's Spirit is there to say, "I love you." God loves you. He has healed you. He is greater than all of the disappointment. "Persevere in hope and fear. I am with you. I am bringing my kingdom."**

So Riverside, are you ready? Are you ready for God to do that right here? Are you ready for him to do it in your life? Alright, I'm going to ask the worship team to come and to help us with a final expression of worship to the Lord. I think we're going to go back to: "Lord, I need you."