

On Groaning

To the Romans..., Pt. 16

We have been spending our Sundays thus far in 2021 in Paul's letter to the church in Rome. This is our 16th message. Don't ask me how many more, because I don't know! But there's fewer messages ahead of us, than behind us...I *think*. But what's your hurry? This is important stuff. Now, for the past few weeks we've been looking at Romans chapters 6, 7, and 8, which have to do with how faith in Christ concretely but profoundly changes us. Especially chapter 8.

And now we get here in the middle part of Chapter 8 to the subject of suffering – for the second time in Romans, actually. But it's ok to be a little redundant, because this topic is so absolutely crucial. If you are going to be equipped in any spiritual way for real life, we have to see how it is that faith in Christ - or how it is that *Christ* actually - does prepare you to face the unavoidable brutalities of life.

I mean, this last year has been a perfect – and terrible – example and we've not even begun to survey the damage. But it's not just the mass suffering events that we're so aware of and make headlines. Everyday people all around us carry suffering in their bodies and their spirits and their minds all the times and often we're not even aware.

We have a young man in the church – healthy, strong – had a fairly common appendectomy – two weeks ago today actually - and for whatever reason has been unable to fully recover from it. Hospitalized for a week and a half and even when he returned home he's been sick and in pain. I keep getting the update texts and at a certain point my replies of “So sorry, we're praying!” begin to feel feeble, if I'm being honest.

Suffering is a problem – a huge problem. So we can't talk about it enough in my opinion. And therefore it's very, very important to look at what this text teaches us. So let's jump in and read our passage for the morning. And as I do, I'd like you to keep your eyes peeled for one word in particular – key word this morning – it's the word “groan” and it's various iterations. So, let me read for you, **Romans 8:13–27**

13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, 14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.”

16 *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. 18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*

19 *For the creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.*

22 *We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?*

25 *But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. 26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.*

OK, there it is, what is it trying to tell us about suffering? I'd say the text this morning gives us three things. First, it gives us a *warning* about suffering. Secondly, it gives us three *resources* for suffering. And finally, it tells us how you can *be sure* those resources will work. So let's take a look...

First, The text gives us a warning about suffering.

Now, this is an amazing passage, very long, and we certainly can't take a look at every single thought unit. But did you watch for that word "groaning"? I did some extended research this week into this Greek word, *stenazo*. It's a very, very strong word with a variety of uses. (Some of them *sexual*, but we won't get into that today!) It's a word that means an expression of pain and agony, but it even goes beyond that. In many cases this word in Greek literature often is used to express the cry of someone who is facing death. It can be a death pain.

So for example, notice in verse 23 it's associated with a woman giving birth to a child. We have to remember especially in ancient times a woman groaning, crying out, screaming really, as she is giving birth is not just an expression of pain, but she's also in mortal danger. In ancient times many, many women died in childbirth.

In the United States today, about 15 women die in pregnancy or childbirth per 100,000 live births. That's way too many, but a century ago it was more than 600 women per 100,000 births. In the 1600s and 1700s, the death rate was twice that - by some estimates, between 1 and 1.5 percent of women giving birth died. In Ancient Rome – when Paul was writing - the conservative estimate is that for every 100,000 births 2,500 women died! As the cigarette ads used to say, “You’ve come along way, baby.”

But as many of you ladies can attest, the “groaning pains of childbirth” are not just about mild discomfort, there’s a life and death struggle going on. In fact, this same word is used to refer to warriors dying on the battlefield. You know, when the fighting is done and the smoke clears and the noise of the battle itself is over, one of the most horrible things so many veterans and first-hand observers of warfare tell you is the groaning of the soldiers left lying out on the ground.

So it’s a word for pregnant moms *and* front line soldiers. See, suffering doesn’t care about your gender or your race or your social standing. Clara Barton was quite a woman, eventually founding the America Red Cross after initially serving as a nurse on the frontlines of the Civil War. I came across this quote this week, it’s interesting on a number of levels – one being the struggle of professional women to find their place in a male dominated society – but more importantly for us is the depiction of our word.

“But I struggled long and hard with my sense of propriety-with the appalling fact that I was only a woman whispering in one ear, and thundering in the other **the groans of suffering men** dying like dogs-unfed and unsheltered.” (Clara Barton, *Medical Life at the Battlefield*, 1862)

That’s a vivid description. But this is often how the Bible uses “groaning”. Just one example, **Ezekiel 26:15**, “*This is what the Sovereign Lord says to Tyre: ‘Will not the coastlands tremble at the sound of your fall, **when the wounded groan** and the slaughter takes place in you?’”* They’re crying out, they’re groaning because they see their blood. They’re desperately wounded, and they see their lives literally ebbing out. They’re crying out and they’re groaning and saying, “Please come and tend my wounds, or I’m dead.”

Now that’s what this word means, or it has that connotation. It’s a death pain. It’s a death groan. And to our surprise, Paul actually speaks about the *creation* groaning, this material world, not just us groaning. We do too, but our material environment, the world itself, is groaning. And it says it’s groaning because it’s crushed under a bondage to decay and to frustration. What does that mean? It means this: *Everything in this world is steadily, irreversibly, inexorably, unavoidably falling apart, wearing down, wearing out, giving out.*

We have this thing called the second law of thermodynamics, which actually confirms that the universe itself is deteriorating. It's running down. It's spending far more energy than it's ever able to restore, and so everything is deteriorating. But we can be much more personal than that. You realize your physical heart is not like an electric clock that just goes on. Your physical heart is like a windup clock. It has been wound up once. There are a finite number of ticks in it. Even as we speak...it's running out.

Your whole body is falling apart. Oh, we can do an awful lot to delay or hide it. For example, one of the reasons some of you use cosmetics is you're trying to restore the color and sheen you used to have *naturally* in your youth. You had it once. You didn't *need* the cosmetics. It's gone. It'll never come back. You can hide the process - some of you can hide it extremely well - but you can't stop it.

Look at the *closest* circle of friends or the *tightest* family. Do you know what time and circumstance is doing? It's picking it apart one by one. Time and circumstance is going to separate you. It's going to remove you from one another. What's the point? Here's the point. We live in a culture in which suffering is an anomaly. We think if you're savvy, if things are working right, we shouldn't suffer. So when we *do* suffer, we get angry. We think life is mistreating us, God is mistreating us, *somebody* is mistreating us.

But this text tells us *everything* your heart longs for is a wave on the sand. It's inevitably *receding* from you. It's all going to go. And in various ways you can avoid suffering for a while, maybe even into your early 30s, but eventually it is unavoidable. Real, bad, horrendous, groaning suffering is just inevitable. It's unavoidable. That's the lesson, a warning. You need resources. Don't think, "Not if I'm smart, not if I'm savvy, not if I'm good - surely it won't happen to me." Yes it will...and don't call me Shirley.

Point two: The text gives us three resources for suffering. What are these three resources? The three resources that Paul says come with Jesus. You bring Jesus into your life and you get these three resources. We can name them under these headings: prayer, pattern, perspective. Let's go through them.

First of all, Prayer. When you suffer, you can process the suffering through prayer. "Well of course," you say, "everybody prays." I mean, the statistics tell us what a high percentage of people pray. And of course, I know it's an exaggeration, and it's kind of an unfair exaggeration: "There are no atheists in foxholes." I know a number of atheists who are particularly irritated by that statement. It's really not fair. It's definitely an exaggeration, but it's trying to get at something.

And that is, when troubles happen, those of us who ordinarily don't pray...we pray. But generally, when problems happen, it's emergency flare prayer. It's like, "If there's anybody up there, help!" That's how we pray. This is talking about something else, something very, very different at the beginning and at the end of the passage.

At the beginning of the passage, we are told about "Abba" prayer. Notice up here in **v.15**, "*For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received **the Spirit of sonship**. And by him we cry, "**Abba, Father**."* What's Abba? It's an Aramaic word – that was Jesus' heart language – and it's an intimate word for "daddy". That is a universal language. Do you know that? In every culture, no matter what your culture, no matter what your language background, basically when a little baby finally gives a name to one of the parents, it always comes out kind of like, "Papa, Abba, Dada." Something like that.

What is this saying? Here's what it's saying. Because of what Jesus Christ has done for you, because of what it means to be in Jesus Christ, when you groan, when you cry, when you scream, even like Job, who cries out in rather unattractive ways, when you cry in Christ, God the Father hears that cry the way a parent hears the cry of their child.

When your child screams in pain, what do you do? You say, "Oh my..." No, you *run*. Now, a parent also knows there are different *kinds* of cries. Oh, that's just the "I'm irritated" cry or "I want some attention" cry. But then there's the "I'm in trouble" cry. And at the mere *sound* of that you spring into action.

And it's not like you love your child more when your child gives the "I am in trouble" cry. You can't really love your child more in principle, but your love is stirred. It's intensified. And this is telling us even in spite of how you feel when you're suffering, when you're in trouble, you can know God responds to your groaning the way a parent responds to the cry of pain from their child.

There's an intense love, an intense care. *Absolutely* can you go to God with that kind of confidence of that kind of care, that kind of attention, that kind of love, but that's not the *only* kind of prayer we're given here. We're told not just about Abba prayer, but look at the end. It's very interesting and a little odd at first.

Look at **v.26-27**, "*In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but **the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express**. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.*" What is that talking about?

Some scholars tie this to an aspect of praying in tongues – and I think that certainly can be a part of it. But it's more than that. You can say that it is the Spirit praying *through* us, but this is clearly a case of the Spirit praying, not *us* praying. This is the Spirit praying. Interceding means doing something in our place, for us. What is it? When we don't know how to pray, the Spirit lays out our petitions before the throne, as we ought to be expressing them were we able.

Now, how many of you can relate to this? Anyone in your younger years remember dating someone - or *wanting* to date someone - and praying, "Oh Lord, please make him or her like me back!" Or if the relationship seems headed for the skids, "Oh, Lord, *please* don't let this relationship break up." And then the relationship *didn't* work out. And now...you are *so thankful* that the prayer wasn't answered?

It's like that old hymn of the church...

Sometimes I thank God for unanswered prayers
Remember when you're talkin' to the man upstairs
That just because he doesn't answer doesn't mean he don't care
Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers

I don't remember which of the ancient saints wrote that one..."

But of course, there's a sense in which there *are no* unanswered prayers. "No", is an answer after all! But more than that, I think, we have to realize the depth of prayer. Because see, like in those boyfriend/girlfriend prayers, there's always a core part to a prayer...and then there's the stupid part.

And the core part is the groan. The core part is, "Help me! I think this is what I need to be the person you want me to be. Please help me *be* this, and please *give* me this. Please help me." That's the core part. And then there's the stupid part; "And I happen to think this is the girl who will do that. I happen to know that *this guy* is the answer." And there's a certain sense in which you wonder, "Did God answer my prayer or not?"

Wouldn't it be great if God always gave you what you would've asked for if you knew everything God knows? Wouldn't it be great if God was *so* gracious that every time you prayed He would give you - and *only* give you, thank goodness, because we're so stupid so often - what you *would've* asked for if you knew every single thing He knew and you saw everything He could see?

We *do* have a God like that, because that's what that text is saying. It's saying, "Even when *you* don't know how to pray...the *Spirit* takes that core. The Spirit prays as you should be praying before the throne." And here's what this means. When you suffer, can you come before God with that kind of confidence, to know He is *going* to give you what you would've asked for - in spite of the fact that right now you probably don't think what He is letting you experience is a good idea - but God *is* going to give you what you would've asked for if you knew everything God knew. And God *does* care, and God *does* love you - God loves you intensely. If you are able to process your suffering before God like that, there'll be a calm. There'll be a groundedness. Ok, that's your first resource, but that's not the only one.

The second resource is a **Pattern**. What do I mean by a pattern? Well, most importantly, it starts with "P" and that's very important to a pastor that all his or her points start with the same letter! But more substantially, you know Paul was a pastor. And therefore, I do understand this part because I'm a pastor too. Constantly, there are people who come to pastors and say, "If God really loves me, *why* are all these problems happening to me? If God *really* loved me, why the tragedy? Why the suffering? If I am loved in Jesus like you say, why is this happening?"

In verse 17, Paul turns the tables. He won't let you believe the voices in your head that say, "Well, the facts of your sufferings must disprove the gospel." He says suffering is a *sign* you're a Christian. It's not just, "Oh, you're a Christian in spite of the suffering." He says suffering is actually a sign you're a Christian. Look what he says in **v.17**, *Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings...*". Suffering is a sign that we're God's children.

You say, "Wait a minute, I just thought you said this is universal... Wasn't your point one that *everybody* suffers, that it's inevitable?" Yes, but notice this isn't saying suffering in general. Notice it's "*his* sufferings", sharing in Christ's sufferings, that leads to glory. What is that? There was a pattern in Jesus' life. The pattern in Jesus' life was rejection. His family didn't understand him. His friends didn't understand him. He was despised. He was a victim of injustice. He was rejected. He wasn't beautiful. He had no form by which we should desire him - as we read in Isaiah a couple of weeks ago.

Jesus had one suffering after another after another, but his attitude was, "...not my will, but thy will be done." He was faithful. He was trusting. He was obedient. And as a result, his death led to life, his weakness led to strength. There was a death to resurrection pattern to Jesus' life. And what Paul is saying is if you do the same, then you share in his sufferings. What does that mean? It means the things that come into your life actually change you. The weakness turns to strength.

Deanna and I do Camp Gladiator a couple of times a week here on the church parking lot. And this week was "Strength and Agility week" – of which I apparently have neither! I pray during that by the way, "Oh God, please kill me!" That's where I experience the death groans. But we did a lot of weights this week, dumbbells. And it makes you stronger - eventually - but initially I just felt a whole lot weaker. Because to strengthen the muscle, the weights have to first *tear* the muscle. Nobody wants that? Or do they?

But that's *exactly* how Paul says God builds strength in us. If you remember, we did a whole sermon on this just a few weeks ago in Romans chapter 5. In **Romans 5:3-5**, he puts it like this, "*We also rejoice in our sufferings...*" And remember, he doesn't say we rejoice "for" our sufferings. This is not spiritual

masochism. And it's not "in-spite of" our suffering, this isn't stiff upper lip, stoicism - "...*because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.*"

An acorn has so much potential in it. A single acorn contains an entire forest. You know, in the acorn there's enough power to create this huge tree with hundreds of other acorns, each of which can produce a tree with hundreds of other acorns. In other words, a single acorn has the power to cover the entire earth with wood, and yet that acorn's potential can't be released unless it goes into the ground and dies.

And the Bible is constantly talking about that. Unless you're humbled, unless you're broken of your self-sufficiency... You are the image of God, and you have potential for understanding and wisdom and insight and compassion for other people. You have the potential for greatness and for *real* joy and hope and character. And what we're being told here is unless that goes into the soil of difficulty and trial, the potential will never emerge. In other words, without weakness there will never be strength. Without death there will never be a resurrection, but it's possible if you share in his suffering, if you follow his pattern.

If you do it looking to Jesus, remembering him, seeing what he did, following him, believing in him, trusting in him, *then* what happens? What actually happens is you become a diamond under that pressure. That's what it's saying. So first of all, you have the processing through *prayer*. And if you process it through prayer, then you have the hope of this *pattern* actually being reproduced in your life, but that's not all.

The third resource is **Perspective**. And this is the most powerful one. Paul is constantly saying what you need in order to handle your suffering is hope. You need patience. He says you have to look to the future, but the best thing he says is this amazing **verse 18**. "*I consider...*" - that word "consider" is key in several places in Romans. It's a Greek word that means "to reckon." It's an accounting word. It means to add it up and to count on it and to think about it and reflect it and make sure you see every facet and every aspect and every penny. So... "*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*"

Now I'm pretty sure I've used this illustration in the last year, but it's worth repeating. Imagine two rooms, you put two people in these two rooms, and you give them absolutely *identical* tasks, menial, boring, difficult manual labor.

And you say, "You're going to work 80 hours a week in this room. You're going to have no vacation for 12 months. It's going to be boring. It's going to be tedious. It's going to be so incredibly difficult."

So you put them both into those rooms, and they get started. And you say to the first guy, "At the end of the 12 months, you will get an annual salary of \$15,000." And you say to the second guy, "At the end of the 12 months, you will get an annual salary of \$150 million." Those two guys are going to experience those *identical* circumstances in radically *different* ways.

Because the first guy after about three or four weeks is going to say, "Who could take anything like this? This is so hard. It's driving me crazy. I can't take it anymore. I quit!" And the other guy is next door whistling. No problem at all. Wait a minute. It's the same circumstances. Why? Because the tediousness, the difficulty, the trial of it is being absolutely overshadowed, outweighed by the glory that will be revealed. The second guy may be in the room *physically*, but in his *mind*, he's already off in the Bahamas!

In other words; How you experience your *present* is completely shaped by what you believe your *ultimate future* to be. Completely. And if you rest the deepest hopes of your heart in *anything* but God, if the deepest hopes of your heart is a political cause, if it's a relationship, if it's a career, if it's writing the great American novel...I'm reading at the moment a book considered the quintessential Austin novel and one of the greatest political novels in American history. Written in 1961 by an aide to LBJ, it got rave reviews. And then he never wrote anything else. He couldn't. Ambition bites the nails of success. He eventually died of a meth overdose in 1978 in some Austin dive. Very talented, very sad.

If you put the deepest hopes of your heart in *anything* but God, it's a thing of *this world*, and it will be subject to suffering. And no matter how strong you think you are, no matter how stoic you are, suffering will *take you out*, and there will be an anxiety current running just below the surface for your entire life. Because your ultimate hope is too limited. It's decaying.

But, if you put your hope in God's future. "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." In heaven! In the word to come. The heavenly realm is eternal. Paul says creation is subject to decay. Now, creation is awfully nice. I mean when you look at the Grand Canyon or you listen to the ocean or you look at the snowcapped mountains, it's pretty glorious.

And yet Paul has the audacity to say the creation itself is just a *shadow* of what it's going to be. That the disease and the viruses and the "...nature, red in tooth and claw ..." is *not* what it was originally intended to be.

So creation is groaning. But what's the hope? Look what **v. 21** says, "*The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.* What's going to liberate creation, nature? It's waiting for *our* liberation. We are groaning inwardly for the redemption of our bodies, and so is nature. In other words, *some* kind of glory is going to come down on us on the last day. We are going to become so radiant, so clean, so great.

What do I mean by that? Humans are created to have five sense, right? Sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. If you lose one of those senses – say blind or deaf, four senses instead of five – that makes a *huge* difference in your ability to navigate life. Doesn't change the *dignity* of your life at all – let's be clear about that, you are equally valued in the sight of God and should be as well in the realm of humanity. But I don't believe there's a blind person alive who wouldn't take sight if it could be offered. The difference between five senses and four senses is huge.

But one day when we're glorified – when we “share in the glory of Christ” – we might have a thousand senses. And what you're going to be like then compared to what you are now...it's the difference between a wooden puppet and a real live boy! There's going to be almost like a bomb of glory that comes down on us, and it's going to be so astounding that it is going to transform the material universe as well. Our glory is going to bring nature with it.

And this is a material thing. The whole idea is redeemed *bodies*, a glorious creation. We're not just getting a spiritualized heaven, because you see, as great as an ethereal, spiritual heaven would be, that heaven would just be a consolation for the life we've lost or even the life we never had, but *resurrection* is the restoration of it. It's the undoing of everything that's wrong. It'll make everything sad come untrue. Everything!

In other words, it's landscapes and it's hugs and it's feasts. It's not just getting *back* the things we've lost. It's doing the things we never could do. It's writing finally the poetry you've always wanted to write. It's performing the music you were never good enough to perform or to compose. I for one, intend to throw a 100mph slider with wicked movement. And I suppose you'll be able to hit it every now and again. But that's our future.

And that's the reason why C.S. Lewis puts it like this in his great essay *The Weight of Glory*. He says, “For if we take the imagery of Scripture seriously, if we believe that God will one day give us the Morning Star and cause us to put on the splendour of the sun, then we may surmise that both the ancient myths and the modern poetry, so false as history, may be very near the truth as prophecy.”

“At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendours we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumour that it will not always be so. Some day, God willing, we shall get in.”

“When human souls have become as perfect in voluntary obedience as the inanimate creation is in its lifeless obedience, then they will put on its glory, or rather that greater glory of which Nature is only the first sketch...We are summoned to pass in through Nature, beyond her, into that splendour which she fitfully reflects.” (43-44)

Do you believe that? I don't believe it anything like I ought to, but I'll tell you this, to the degree it's real to me in prayer, to the degree I grasp it and understand it and think about it and celebrate it, to *that* degree...it overshadows the tedious circumstances of my life in that little room. *Perspective*; grasp it. *Prayer*; process it. And then you will find suffering only reproduces the *Pattern* of weakness into strength, and mediocrity into greatness in your life that you see in Jesus Christ's death and Resurrection life.

Now, finally, the text tells us how you can be sure those resources will work. You say, "Well, wow! Okay, but how do I *know*? Here you are a preacher, and you're telling me God sees me in Christ as a child. But listen, when I suffer, I don't feel God loves me. Or you say in the future there's going to be this great glory. Well, when I suffer, I don't feel that at all. It's unreal to me. I feel maybe even unworthy of it. How can I be sure these resources will work?"

Here's all I can tell you from this text. Remember it says the Spirit of God "groans". That's amazing. It's not just creation that groans, and it's not just we who groan. The Spirit of God groans. And that's weird, because remember the word groan means a death pain. It means a person in mortal danger of dying. It means a person in enormous agony and pain.

How can the Spirit of God, how can God who is immortal and eternal and omnipotent and infinite *possibly* groan? How could an omnipotent God know what it's like to be a woman screaming out in labor knowing she may be about to be giving her life in order to bring a new life into the world?

How could God know the agony and groaning of the warrior out on the battlefield, crying out for rescue but knowing he has probably just given his life for his people in battle? How could God know that kind of suffering? How could God know that kind of groaning and pain? Do you know what the answer is? It's Jesus Christ.

By taking on human flesh – the Christmas story - God was plunged into an ocean of vulnerability. He came into this groaning world. He came in, and he was subject to rejection and to weakness. He was subject to hunger. He was subject to alienation, to torture and eventually to death – the Easter story.

And there's a place in Mark's gospel where people bring to Jesus a man who is deaf and mute – he's lost one of those senses we talked about. And they bring him to Jesus and Jesus touches him and **Mark 7:34-35** says, "*He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, 'Ephphatha!' (which means 'Be opened!')*". At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly." Now, this gets lost in the excitement of the healing, but when it says "Jesus sighed", that is our same word for "groaned".

Jesus is already groaning because he has come into the world and he's standing alongside of sufferers and he's feeling, he's empathizing, with what they're going through. But it's on the cross that he went all the way, because on the cross Jesus Christ says, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Now, you may know that he's quoting a Psalm there from the cross. He only quotes the first half, but let me show you the rest, **Psalm 22:1**, here's the whole verse, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?*"

Jesus Christ on the cross was a warrior on the ultimate battlefield. Ah, but he's not the conquering general rearing back on his mighty warhorse. He identifies with the dead and dying soldiers groaning across the bloody ground. The prophet Isaiah says he went forth to face *our* enemies, evil and sin and death, and the result? (**Isaiah 53:5**) "*But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities...*" And now he's groaning! He's dying, and he calls out and no one comes. Do you know why? "*...the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.*" The Bible says this was God absorbing in Himself the penalty the human race deserves for *all* the evil we've done to each other, to the world, even to God.

He was paying the penalty for our sins, so now you *can* know, because Jesus Christ was abandoned in his groaning you never will be. Because Jesus Christ was forsaken in his death groan, when you groan, the Father hears it the way a mother or father hears the cry of a child, and He loves you. And your Heavenly Father hears the cry, the groan, and He ignores the stupid part of the petition, and He answers what you would've asked for if you were smart enough to know.

God surrounds you, and God makes you something great through the suffering. And someday God is going to put an end to it forever. Jesus Christ died on the cross so someday God could end evil and suffering in this world without ending us. That's the hope. Do you believe that?

If you do, you can sing with the church...a real hymn this time!

As I journey through the land, singing as I go,
Pointing souls to Calvary—to the crimson flow,
Many arrows pierce my soul from without, within;
But my Lord leads me on, through Him I must win.

Oh, I want to see Him, look upon His face,
There to sing forever of His saving grace;
On the streets of glory let me lift my voice,
Cares all past, home at last, ever to rejoice.

In the midst of the strife, you think about that future, that distant triumph song. Get the perspective, process through prayer, and the pattern of Jesus Christ will be reproduced in your life. That's how you can handle the suffering.

Let's pray...