

UNCERTAINTY AND THE CERTAIN

Romans 8:26–28

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Romans 8:26–28 (NIV)

“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. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

As we have gone through this eighth chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans, we find ourselves continually jumping ahead to the end. As believers, we are people who, as it were, sit down with the book and get to reading along in the early chapters, and then begin to wonder how the story's going to turn out. Succumbing to the temptation, we turn to the end, the last chapter, and find out how everything's going to fit together. Romans 8 and the Book of Revelation are this way. They keep leaping us ahead to the end. To show us that glorification or glory, honor, waits ahead. But there is this tension—this really dynamic and spiritual paradox that, while we know clearly the end, nevertheless, now we groan. The creation groans. We groan. And as we've seen in the Scripture today, the Spirit groans. There is agony connected with this life. There is suffering, which also the Christian has his share in. In order to keep us moving in a time like this—while we're pondering, as Paul does in 8:17, that we are the heirs with God, joint heirs with Christ—while pondering this tremendous theme, he leads us also to the understanding that a mark of our being an heir is also that we suffer. And there are four grounds which the apostle gives from 8:18 to the end of the chapter in regard to how we may then cope with these times of groaning, these times of suffering.

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The first ground we looked at last week, that the sufferings now are not worth to be compared to the glory which is coming. For indeed the sufferings now, however deep they are when weighed and put on the scale against the weight of glory, glory always comes up heavier on the scale. Our afflictions—given God’s eternal day, when we look back on them—will seem light. This is something which we come to on a doctrinal level, not necessarily an experiential level. There are times we feel when we go through a dark experience that indeed is so heavy and can hardly be carried. But we’re assured from the Scripture the glory which is coming is heavier than any trial we ever had on earth.

The second ground for encouragement that the apostle is giving to us is that the Spirit helps us in our weakness. Before we kind of get into this theme, I want to kind of do a footnote on the theme of suffering and illness. We indicated last week that part of our suffering as Christians is derived from two sources. Our linkage with Christ, whereby—because of our stand with Christ—we incur the opposition of the world. This opposition can be sometimes physical, like at Lystra where the apostle was stoned for his testimony. Or sometimes it can simply be mental, like at Athens where they simply laughed him out of town. The second cause of our suffering is a result of our linkage with the human race. So that such things as financial reverses, and accidents, and death and trials, and sometimes illness, as well, occur to the believer. Accidents happen to believers as well as unbelievers.

When we come to the matter of sickness, there’s a great deal of controversy among Christians—especially those who believe in divine healing. Is God always bound with an affirmative every time we ask Him for healing? We could take a whole series on this. I want to give a couple helpful footnotes on the subject. One is from the Scripture. It is always right to pray for healing. I can never find an incident in Scripture where the Scripture is saying, “Don’t pray to be healed.”

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A second thing, however, we must keep in mind is Paul's teaching in Romans 8 which says to us that while sometimes we do not have the answers to the, "Why didn't God do something," nevertheless, we do have encouragement in the suffering. We must be careful how the interplay of these two teachings relate to one another.

First, the incentive for faith and to believe God and not to simply become passive in regard to illness. But on the other—for the believer who is suffering—nevertheless, God does not take away His comfort by only saying to him in an accusing way, "The reason why you weren't healed is because you do not have enough faith." Often, that is a tremendous blow upon the blow of illness that comes to a believer who has truly trusted in God—coming along and saying that, "You're like this because of something you have done or you have failed to do." So the wisdom which the Spirit alone can give helps us at times to face the matter of healing with faith—and also face suffering with the courage and the doctrine which the Scripture lays before us.

We recognize that it is upon us as Christians not to set Scripture in Scripture—not to quote Scripture against the Scripture. And not to find the proof text when maybe not all of the text, when looked at, leads to that particular conclusion. That balance is found.

I think a third thing in regard to healing that we need to recognize is that God is the ultimate Healer and the means He uses can be direct or it can be indirect. Only God can set a bone. The physician may get it in order, but only God can put the process together in such a way that it heals. There's a beautiful passage in Exodus 15 where the children of Israel have just come out of Egypt, and they have marched three days in the wilderness, and they have been without water, and they come to an oasis. Immediately, their spirits leap up within them at the joy of seeing the oasis. But when they get to the edge of it, they discover that the water is bitter and they complain. God tells Moses, "Chop down that tree there and throw it in the water. When it is in the water, the water will become sweet." This is my theological justification for aspirin. God

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could speak directly to the water and, by the power of His Word, make the water sweet.

Sometimes He uses the indirect means. Whether direct or indirect—whether through a direct healing from God which has no human intermediary or even through the use of medicine—it is God who is the ultimate Healer.

Kind of a last little footnote I want to say on this is—since there is some confusion, I think, today among Christians on this matter of “claiming your healing.” God does not expect you to bear witness of your healing to the world if in fact you are, from external evidences, ill. That matter of faith is for you. It may be for one or two other believers to closely share in faith. But as an example of this, I’d like to point to Acts 3, where there is a paralyzed person who is at the Gate Beautiful. By the way, any time we come to an illness which is inward, we must compare the working of that illness and its healing with something that is also organic and can be evidently seen. For example, the paralytic, when Peter and John say to him, “Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I to you. In the name of Jesus Christ, rise up and walk.” If they had simply said to the paralytic, “I want you to claim your healing and have faith for the healing,” and then walked away, he’d still have been there laying lame. He would have been in ill advantage to witness to the world as long as he was laying there, “God has healed me.” Properly, he could say, “I believe God is going to heal me.” But it does no good for him to be flopping around on the ground as a witness to the world saying, “God has healed me.”

There is a measure, I think, of sanctified common sense that God expects us to have in regard to this—to be able to learn the way faith fits in and that God is not asking us to say something that is not yet evident to the world. He’s asking us to keep that on an inward level. For example, in Mark 1 when Jesus healed the man with leprosy, He said, “Go show yourself to the priests and offer for cleansing what Moses commanded you as proof to the people.” Jesus did not ask him to show the priests proof of his faith in healing, but evidence that healing had taken place. The

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priests in that culture served as medical doctors in determining whether or not the leprosy had gone away. So if you have prayed and God has healed you, don't be afraid at all to go verify it. Check it out. Get the authentication as proof to the people. Your faith is not the proof to the people, but your healing is. Your faith is proof to yourself, after you pray for the healing, that God is going to do a work. The proof can always be claimed and established by others. I share these things with you in order to keep us, as I indicated last week, from being "charismatic Christian Scientists."

To come to the text for today, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. There are two contrasts that I would like for us to see in this text. The first contrast is in verse 26: "We do not know." And the contrast in verse 28: "We know."

I. We do not know, but we know.

What do we not know? There are occasions, Paul says, where we do not know how to pray as we ought. This not knowing how to pray as we ought is not a general characteristic of all prayer. It is not something we should have on a daily basis. Where we come to the Lord and kneel in prayer for our time of relating to Him in prayer and say, "Lord, I don't know what to pray for today, so this is just like yesterday, so I'll simply be passive and quiet here for a while." There are many things in Scripture, which we know clearly to pray for, and we have clear prayers in Scripture in which to model our own prayer after. The Lord's Prayer, for an example, is a clear pattern of prayer. Requests we have of God; three requests we have of Him. Then requests we have for ourselves.

Paul's prayer in Romans 1 is that he might go to Rome, that he might impart some spiritual gift and the like. He is not praying as though he did not know how to pray, but in that moment he is praying with articulation and pinpoint accuracy. When Jesus comes to His final prayer with His disciples in John 17, he does not close the Upper Room time with them by saying, "As we come

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to a conclusion, I do not know how to pray as I ought.” Instead, He prays that the Father will glorify Him, that the disciples will be kept from the evil one and from the world, and that all the believers to come—which includes us—may truly be one. The articulate prayer. So it is right and proper that the preponderance of our praying be in a definite, concrete form that is always in God’s will, or the kingdom of God to have a deeper rootage in our life.

So when we say we know not how to pray, it is not necessarily a characteristic of all praying. Many prayers, we know what to pray for. But the “we know not how to pray” uniquely within the context of Romans 8, as it is given here, applies to the theme, “If we suffer with Him...” It is these moments when we are suffering—when we are in distress, when there is darkness about us in terms of God’s guidance and His will and His presence—it is in these times we literally do not know how to pray. Isn’t that the pattern of Jesus in the garden of Gethsamene? We see Him struggling with this. We know not how to pray as we ought. So on the one hand, He’s saying, “Father remove this cup from Me.” But He really does not know how to pray, in a sense. He does, and He doesn’t. He finally comes to saying, “Nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done.”

We face those times in prayer when we’re asking the Lord for something very specific and yet we fall back and we say, “Nevertheless, we know not how to pray.” There are all kinds of occasions where this crops up in our life. You may be a young person here today, a single, young person, who has been deeply disappointed in a courtship situation where you feel that God wanted that person for your life and now you do not know how to pray as you ought. You may be a man or a wife here in this building today, and you are coping with the matter of rejection, which has been experienced by you in regard to a mate. You literally do not know how to progress, to go forward, in a time like this. You may have tried a number of doors which you thought to be the will of God, and every door, as you tried it, has slammed shut on you. And

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you're just staggering along not knowing how to pray as you ought. Especially, I think, the phrase, "We know not how to pray as we ought," comes when we stand in a moment as a family when someone who has been very dear to us, who maybe has died before their time, has been ushered away from us into the Lord's presence. I've stood in those moments, and I literally do not know how to pray as I ought in that time. Because the grief is so strong and the questions are so mighty that we don't know, really, how to pray.

I think of a Scripture reference in Acts 12 where the Early Church itself went through this.

James, one of the inner three apostles, is executed for his faith by Herod Agrippa I. And then the disciples, in Acts 12:5, meet in the house of John Mark's mother. And what are they doing? The Church made earnest prayer for Peter. Sometimes we think that because Peter was released, they were praying for Peter's release from prison. I'm not so sure that is the case. Because in Acts 4, when the disciples had been threatened, they don't pray that God will change the circumstances. They pray that God will change them in the circumstances. Not that He'll make the circumstances better or give three members of the Sanhedrin a heart attack as a sign that God is against them. But instead, they're praying that God will give them boldness. I'm sure that there was perplexity in the Church when James was killed. And now what's going to happen with Peter? Literally, not knowing how to pray. Of course, praying for his release and also submitting all things to the ultimate will of God. So they simply wind up praying for him, not praying for some specific event to happen. (That's not what the text says, but praying for him.)

There are times when we come to these excruciating moments when we do not know how to pray as we ought. The temptation is to ask the question, "Why? Why, God, has this happened?" Instead, in prayer God is wanting us to focus on a more concrete theme: What now is to happen? It is the Spirit that is leading us into this. What now, when we do not know how to pray as we ought?

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So that this contrast occurs. We know not how to pray. That's the immediate. That's the near.

But then, in verse 28, Paul leaps over this and says, "We know that in everything God is working for the good." In other words, Paul is saying, "As Christians, we can always be certain about the ultimate, even when we are uncertain about the immediate." This is where faith comes in. God is going to put it all together. We may not be able to see what is going to happen with steps one, two, and three, but we certainly know what steps eight, nine, and ten are.

There's a gospel song in our hymnal written by Ira Stanphill. He went through a tragic experience in his own life as a young minister. His wife went away from the Lord, left him, and became a night club singer. While really in sin, away from the Lord, she was tragically killed in an automobile accident. Ira Stanphill is in that position where he literally did not know how to pray as he ought. He writes this song, "I don't know about tomorrow. Many things about tomorrow I don't seem to understand. But I know who holds tomorrow, and I know who holds my hand." The uncertainty of the immediate: "I don't know about tomorrow." The certainty of the distant: "But I know who holds tomorrow."

As in a military engagement, you may lose a battle now and then and ultimately win the war. So we, as believers, have already leaped ahead to the end and seen—as the Bible closes—One who is seated on the throne, high and lifted up above the earth. So there is this contrast. We know not what we know. And what we know in terms of the ultimate is a tremendous encouragement for us when we go through a time of suffering.

There is a second contrast, however, in these verses which we want to look at.

II. We know not, but He knows.

Verse 26: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know how to pray as we ought. The Spirit is interceding for us." Verse 27: "He who searches the hearts of men knows what we know

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not, but He who searches knows what is the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

In our not knowing, the Spirit helps us. The word here for help is literally “together,” “over against,” “to take.” It’s a combination of three words lumped into one. And it means that when a person is in need, someone else comes along with the strength to help them cope with that need and to overcome it. From our point of view in this “we know not,” the spirit is groaning within us with groanings inarticulate. We have seen the creation is groaning. We have seen, in verse 23, that we are groaning. Now the Spirit himself in us is groaning. The RSV says, “intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.” Actually, the more precise translation of that is “the Spirit intercedes with groanings inarticulate.”

We want to look at the fact that this may mean one of two things. It can include both. Groanings inarticulate can certainly be involved. When we’re in a time when we know not how to pray as we ought, it may mean doing what Paul calls “praying in the Spirit,” which is speaking to God in intercession through tongues. Indeed, tongues are for the purpose of prayer and praise to God. They are God-directed, not man-directed. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14: “If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. What am I to do? I will pray with the Spirit.” In other words, in those times I don’t know how to pray as I ought, the Spirit comes alongside of me and prays for me. Groanings inarticulate. I don’t understand it. I don’t know the expression that is going forth, but the Spirit at that moment is pouring forth His words to the Father for my life. But also this groaning can mean simply longings and heartaches and aspirations which well up within the spiritual depths, which cannot be imprisoned within the confines of everyday words, or even tongues. A groaning. It is in those moments of groaning that the Spirit is interceding for us according to the will of God.

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I should relate an experience here that may tie this together a little bit. Four years ago now, in 1973, I had left for a vacation from the church and wound up that vacation by going to the General Council of the Assemblies of God in Miami Beach, Florida. It seems to me that the enemy especially likes to attack us on vacation. That's when we should get rest. He likes to create hassles, if he could, so we would become spiritually disturbed. This is one of the oddest vacations I've ever taken, because the longer I was on vacation, the more depressed I got. Totally depressed, and there seems to be no apparent reason. By the time I got to Miami, I became exceedingly depressed. And I began to believe such things as, "There is no longer any future for me; whatever I've done in my life has been done, but from now long it's going to be a steep decline. God is through with me." I just felt abandoned. No external reason for this, but just an inner sort of attack. I recall, about the middle of the week in Miami Beach, I couldn't even sleep, I'd become so depressed. My life was really filled with groaning. I got up Monday evening about eleven and just decided to walk the streets, feeling like if I walked long enough I could exhaust myself and I could sleep. Finally about two in the morning, while still walking one way (I hadn't turned around yet because I hadn't begun to feel sleepy) finally I came to a realization of a sermon that I had once preached of the three ways Satan attacks the Church: Try to pick off leaders, then try to cause division in the Body, and outside persecution. One thing he was trying to do was pick me off. The minute I saw scriptural truth, I began to be encouraged. I called a taxi and went home and went straight to sleep, and the depression lifted. Looking back on the experience, in the depression, when I felt totally abandoned by God and I was sighing with words inarticulate and being so discouraged—I wasn't even praying in the Spirit, but just groaning—I wasn't alone.

That's what Paul is saying here. When you're groaning, when you feel most alone, when you can't even get up the nerve to speak to God, it is at that moment that the Spirit of God is

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interceding for us through the groaning. When you can't pray as you ought, the Spirit himself is interceding for you. And the Father, who reads the intent of the Spirit's mind, always knows that when the Spirit prays, He is praying according to the will of God. And when you cannot pray yourself, it is the Spirit praying within you—in ways that you cannot even understand and sometimes don't even realize.

It's like riding a two-wheeler bicycle. You may have thought you were in the front seat and God was in the back seat. But let's suppose that you become slumped over and your head is lying there and your feet are dangling over the pedals. The Spirit is there, and He takes up the slack when you can't keep it going any more.

This is what Paul means when he says the Spirit intercedes with groanings inarticulate. As God searches the hearts of the children of God, He finds unuttered and unutterable groanings. Though they are inarticulate, there is a meaning that cannot escape the omniscient eye of God. Our groanings are wholly intelligible to Him. And furthermore, as the Spirit groans, they are found to be in accordance with His will. Since they are the intercessions of the Holy Spirit, they are always met with the understanding and with the approval of God. These groanings are as agreeable to God's will as are the intercessions of Christ at the right hand of God.

Here is an initial, beautiful teaching in Romans that we really, as Christians, have two intercessors. We have Christ in Romans 8:34, who intercedes for us at the right hand of God. But also, we have the Holy Spirit who is interceding in our heart. They are two spheres of intercession. One is in the heavens. We have a friend who appears on our behalf in the heavens, on the right hand of God the Father. But we have the Holy Spirit, in the theater of our hearts, interceding for us as well. And their intercessions agree.

To illustrate this whole theme again, there are times we know not; nevertheless we can know. And there are times, also, when we know not. But in the "we know not," the Spirit is groaning

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according to the will of God, bringing something into existence that we didn't have the strength or the wisdom or the foresight to pray for.

It's helpful to look at stories, which sometimes manifest this in a beautiful way. I think one of the outstanding stories in my own background and life is the story of my uncle. When I was a young man of sixteen, my uncle died. This was in 1957. I, as a child with missionary parents, had known him as a little boy when his family and our family were on the China-Tibetan border together as missionaries. Their location was about thirty miles away from ours. He was a great big man, 6'3" or 6'4". A couple hundred pounds. Not overweight, but just a huge man. If ever I had known a godly person, it was my uncle. When he died, I didn't know a great deal about the circumstances of his life—although I had known that early in his life as a missionary, he had been married and had a little boy, but something had happened to them and they had died. I knew nothing about the circumstances of what had happened at all. It wasn't until my cousin, who was ten years older than me and is today a missionary in Taiwan, wrote a book—a story of my uncle's life—that I realized what had happened. It's an example of what I am speaking about today.

He had gone to the Tibetan border as a single missionary in 1908. He spent from 1908 to 1949, with the exception of a few years, on the China-Tibetan border. In 1919, eleven years later, he came home and met young lady who was to be his wife. The two of them went back after the birth of their son to China and Tibet. They were located in a little town, and they were staying in rented quarters that were inadequate. Tibet is a very, very cold country. It's winter nine months of the year. In the summer, it usually doesn't get above 50 degrees. Exceedingly mountainous area. No one wanted to rent to them. They just got a very inadequate place. No place in that rented quarters to preach the gospel. God opened to them a door to buy a particular piece of property on which there were buildings they could use for the expansion of the gospel—only

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there were no funds available. The property was six thousand dollars, and that just so happened to be the amount of money that they had in the bank at home in their own savings account, which was for their retirement years and years down the road. They felt especially led of God to go ahead and take this money and to use it for the Lord's work. They withdrew it. They bought this place. They began ministering there. Then some turbulence began to arise in China and they began to feel, "If Tibet is ever going to be evangelized, it's going to take someone who goes through Tibet and preaches the gospel to the tribes of people." So they decided to have a separation for a few months. My uncle was to go on this trip into the land of Tibet. But just a few weeks before he was to take off, something happened.

"With these plans in mind, they prepared to go their separate ways—little realizing how soon and in what manner their separation was to come about. During the first week of January 1927, a local resident died of the dreaded disease small pox. Within a few short days, several more had died. On the night of January 9, the missionary's little son suddenly became ill with fever and pain. He was five-and-a-half years of age at the time. At first, they didn't guess the nature of the illness. But very soon, their fears became fact. The little boy had small pox."

What followed is told by a lonely, heartbroken missionary in a letter to his sister in America:

"During the next three days, there was some fever and pain. We were always comforted in prayer, but the sickness did not leave him. On the third day, the small pox appeared, turning dark almost immediately. We prayed so earnestly for our dear little boy. But Jesus wanted him.

During the first seven days of the child's illness, my wife never spared herself. We prayed together. We watched together. On the seventh day, she had to give up. The small pox had broken out on her also. My dear wife and little boy lay there in separate rooms. I did all I knew how for them. I would pray with one and then with the other. When I could get away a few moments, I would go cry out to God. But our loving Father let me know His will for them. My

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heart was broken, yet I did not give up. I hoped and pleaded till the last. On January 20, at 8:30 in the morning, Jesus took our boy to be with Him. He was so patient during those days. He always helped me so nicely as I bathed him and changed his clothes. Then he would ask me to tell him stories. He never tired of listening to the stories of Jesus and Samuel, in soft, sweet whispers. Before he went to be with Jesus, he told me he loved Jesus. A little later he said softly, ‘Daddy, Jesus loves me. I have no more pain.’ This was the last he said, and then he was gone. How should I tell my wife what had happened? But God helped. A little later, I helped her into his room for one last little look at John.”

After assisting his wife back to her room, he returned to his son’s room to prepare the body for burial. From unfinished boards, he nailed together a small box. Then with heavy heart, the father lifted the frail body from the bed and placed it in the casket. With his own hands, he nailed down the lid. Nobody would sell the missionary a burial plot. Finally, with a bitter ache in his heart, the father dug a small grave in the garden beside the house.

“While a short service was being held on the front yard by a Chinese Christian, my dear wife and I stood by, our hearts crushed. Then I helped lower our dear little boy into the grave. After this, I was with my wife constantly. During these last days, many were the time I would kneel by my wife, and together we would pour out our hearts before the Lord. Many times there was relief, and at all times there was perfect victory. Frequently, there was a, ‘Praise the Lord,’ from her lips, from her very heart. On the morning of January 27, we had our last little talk. We read together from the Word. We sang our last hymn together, ‘My Anchor Holds.’ She asked me to help her sit up. For a very short time, she rested in this position. Then she began to sing in such sweet tones, ‘Jesus is coming for me.’ Then her head fell against my right arm. The very dearest on earth to me had gone to be with Jesus.”

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“Within the same week, the missionary had lost the two who were closest to him. Now he was alone in death’s valley. Only God knew of the darkness, the desolate feeling that swept over him. A Chinese Christian kindly went to the carpenter shop and bought a casket, which was brought back to the mission station. With one long, last look, he lifted his wife’s body from the bed and placed it in the rough coffin. As he nailed down the lid, each stroke of the hammer plunged him deeper and deeper into the dark valley. There seemed to be no relief for his despair of soul or the awful sense of loneliness. The last nail in place, he stood dejectedly—hammer in hand, bent beneath a load of grief such as few men have had to bear far out in the mountains of Tibet. Only God heard the quiet sobs which arose in the emptiness of that dreary room, and only God understood the sorrow of his servant that day.”

Only God understood the sorrow of his servant that day. It is in that precise moment when my uncle did not know how to pray, did not even understand what had happened and did not understand, I believe, until he went to be with Christ. It is in that precise moment when he was the most alone, when he was sobbing from the depth of his being—at that moment, Paul is saying, that the Spirit intercedes for us. In that moment when we feel most cast off, most separated from God, the heavens are like brass and blackness. It is in that moment the Spirit intercedes for us according to the will of God with groanings inarticulate. We do not even realize in that moment what is happening, but God—who understands the human heart—intercedes for us according to the will of God.

As it turns out, my uncle went on from there. He decided not to sit there and keep asking the question, “Why?” all the rest of his life, but, “What now?” In answer to that question, he went out and buried his wife and little boy in one grave on the mountain hillside, because the ground was too cold to dig two graves. He sat down with his diary and wrote in that diary, “Until the furthest nook and corner of Tibet has heard the call of God and the story of redemption in Christ,

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my task is not complete. Until the last man has heard the gospel, my work is not done.” And he proceeded to take off and walk—the first white man to walk the length of Tibet from the China side to the Indian side. It took him nine months. Lowell Thomas reported him dead. But he went on.

God later worked it for good. The thing which happened was not good in itself. But later my uncle married again, brought into the world children—one who is a missionary and one has been a missionary. He’s in the ministry today. Somehow God, through that time when he was in deepest despair, was interceding for him and working things out according to the will of God. Truly, in that moment he did not know how to pray as he ought. But he knew, on the other hand, “God is working all things for the good.” Truly, he did not know what the Spirit was praying. But God, who intercedes for us according to the will of God, knows and was praying for him. The point is that the Christian—in the midst of his sorrow, in the midst of his suffering, in the midst of his trouble—is not like the person who does not have Christ. He is not alone. Jesus has said, “I will never leave you alone. I will never forsake you. I am with you always.” So the difference that stands out between the believer and the person who has now put his faith in Christ is that we are not exempt from problems, but we always know that Christ is with us. And God, sometimes in the providence of His will, allows the great persons of the faith like Paul and, I think, like my uncle, to go through deeper valleys, maybe, than any of us have ever walked—that through the depth of their struggle, we might have a word of hope to recognize God is with us in our own struggles.

Paul will go on to say, then, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31). Jesus has said, “The bruised reed, He will not break” (Matthew 12:20). You may be at that point in your life when you feel very bruised, and you’re like a blade of grass which has been bent. The Spirit,

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however, is interceding for you. And that which is bent in your life might not be broken, but might be restored and made whole.

Closing Prayer

You have sent those words to us today, heavenly Father, finding us where we're at in our life. Maybe having recently been through a deep time of travail, or presently passing through one or about to pass through one. We remember the Word of our Lord, how He said to us, "In the world, you will have tribulation. Be of good courage. I have overcome the world." Lord, we frankly confess that there are experiences we have gone through—there are situations, Lord—that even recently we have passed through, and even with friends here in our church, we do not know how to pray as we ought. We only have this confidence that we know, in the ultimate situation, all things are working for the good. We know that You know the groanings and translate them in the language of heaven so that there will come a more complete day when we ourselves will stand before You and will be able to not only see, "What now?" But we ourselves will even have the answer to, "Why?" Here we groan. Creation groans. The Spirit groans. Waiting for the day of liberation. Lord, let what I shared today be a strong, steel fiber in our spiritual existence, to shore us up against the attacks of the enemy who has been saying to us in our dilemmas and in our suffering, "God is not with you. If He really loved you, He would care for you in the way that you expect Him to." Lord, it is in those moments, in the moment when we are listening to that, when we feel truly cast off and alone. Then our groaning, just the groaning itself, we know is evidence of the Spirit's presence that He is with us and in us. Lord, we know that as we commit our lives to You, that You are going to work for us. You're going to bring us through. We have this confidence. We just praise Your Name and thank You. And we have just learned, "Through it all, I've learned to trust in Jesus. I've learned to rely on His Word." These things, Lord, we ask in Your Name. Amen.