

Sermon Growth Guide

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Renewed Creation | Romans 8:22-30

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Key Verse: Romans 8:28 – “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.”

Big Idea: God’s desire is not only to redeem us, but also to restore his creation, enabling us to be participants in his purposes for his beloved world.



Foundations

We’re all familiar with the slogan – *If you’re not part of the solution, you’re part of the problem.* This is a clear either-or-statement, but that is not what scripture says. Scripture tells us that we are both a part of the problem and a part of the solution.

What is the problem? It is a broken world. Pastor Tim said “Everything stinks...everything is broken.” He’s right and we hate the shape the world is in. It’s not news and it wasn’t news to the Old Testament writers. Genesis 3:17 tells us “Cursed is the ground because of you.” And Isaiah 24:5 says that “the earth is defiled by its people.” We did that.

What is the solution? Ultimately the solution is in the resurrection and its life-restoring power, but our text today tells us that we – the problem-makers – are part of the solution as well. Romans 8: 19 tells us that “...the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.” Craig Barnes was fond of saying that the groaning world is waiting for us to show up – to fulfill the creation mandate of Genesis by helping to fix what is broken.

Fixing the broken does not mean worshipping the earth. Involvement in ecological causes is not our only job. We are still to exercise wise dominion, but it really means bringing God’s new life and glory into everything we do...teaching, medicine, engineering, the arts, our relationships. The list goes on.

Understanding God’s Word

Read Romans 8:28-30. These verses have been debated over the centuries with one word derived from them that generates immediate debate – *predestination*. Do we have free will or not? The questions abound. This is a clear statement about the sovereignty of God, but there is probably something pastoral also going on here. From the beginning Paul has been talking about the great love of God in saving sinners. What if this passage is about that as well? What if Paul is saying this? “God chooses you and he has known you before time began. He loves you so much he will make sure that no matter what, you will become like Jesus.”

Discuss: How would that understanding of this passage affect your relationship with God?

Applying God’s Word

Creation groans. Believers groan. The Spirit groans. And yet we all hope. In what ways do our shared groanings and shared enduring hope function in our life together?

Witnessing God’s Word

In your life and work, what are some specific ways in which you, as a redeemed child of God can “show up?”

Everything stinks. That's what this sermon is about. Everything is broken. Let's just have a big complain fest! The grumpy minister will lead the way. This world is trashed. That would be fun, wouldn't it? Just get it out. You have to be careful what documentaries you watch. I recently watched a new Netflix documentary called The Plastic Detox. Boy, am I depressed. Microplastics are in everything! We are eating, breathing, sucking in microplastic toxins through our skin and food and perfumes and cups and plastic spoons... You can't escape it. The documentary is actually about six couples who are trying to have children. Removing plastics from their environment helped. I'm not defending the science, just telling you what the documentary said, and that it left me glum! We can't escape plastic. It's everywhere. Yes. There is poison everywhere. Family systems are breaking down, schools are failing, leaders are faltering, churches are failing. Poison everywhere. Romans knows and tells us about it.

What Are You Praying For? In 40 Days of Prayer, what are we praying for? We are praying for inner peace. We are praying for resurrection power. From last week we are praying for enduring hope. Next week we pray for conquering love, and we will gather around the church at 12:30 and hold hands and pray. Today we are called to pray for something bigger than ourselves, we are called to pray for Renewed Creation. Everything stinks. Everything is broken. The poison is everywhere. What is God doing about that and how could we possibly be involved? You've heard me quote this before. I love the way this is put by Fleming Rutledge in her book, *The Crucifixion*: "Gross injustice demonstrates a basic premise: in our world, something is terribly wrong and cries out to be put right." There is something wrong in the world and it needs to be put right. This is a statement I think everyone can agree with. The question is, what is wrong?

See, this passage is a worldview passage. This is one of the places in the Bible where our glasses get adjusted, we get new lenses on how we see everything. This is a passage that comes straight at the key worldview questions. What is the fundamental nature of this universe? What is wrong with it? How does it get fixed?

"We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time." (Romans 8:22) At the end of last week's passage we learned that we are connected somehow to the brokenness. The world hurts because of us, because of fallen humanity. "For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God." (Romans 8:19-21) The world is hurting and broken because when we ruptured our relationship with God, the whole world bore the consequences. Since we were the first into disobedience and brokenness, so the world knows that we will be first into reconciliation and restoration, and only then will this creation be relieved of its pain.

But let's go back. What is the fundamental nature of this universe? Is it all a random collection of matter? Are we a cosmic accident of physics? Physicist Richard Feynman said, "There is nothing that living things do that cannot be understood from the point of view that they are made of atoms acting according to the laws of physics." If that is so, then what is wrong is physical, material misalignment. There may be nothing we can do. Is the universe spinning apart in increased entropy, spinning down like a wound-up spring, just waiting to fizzle out? If that's so, then nothing we do will matter. In five billion years the Sun just fizzles out. If you don't know your origin or your destination, how can you hope to navigate this messed up world? Christianity has a fundamentally

different answer. This world was created by God, broken by sin, and is being restored. Don't underestimate the profound explanatory power of this simple Christian doctrine. The world was made good, is fundamentally good, but is not working right now because something was thrown off. But the Maker is putting it right again and we are invited to participate.

So, creation, personified here, is standing on tiptoe waiting to see this restoration. Creation is in bondage, waiting to be set free. This is an explanation for natural disasters. If we were the natural products of the world as it is, we would not be distressed to see the world shake us up with earthquakes or hurricanes or floods. But something in us knows that this is not as it should be. Slugs are not surprised by floods. We are. We reject them. Something inside of us, big and growing, says this is all supposed to be put right. The groaning is not actually the groan of a victim who was mugged or beaten or is crawling out of a car crash. It's the groaning of pregnancy. "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies." (Romans 8:22-23)

How then do we pray? What are you praying for? The Holy Spirit helps us. Do I know how to fix all that is wrong in this world? I don't. Do I know what restoration of all things looks like? I don't. So, in some ways, I don't really know what to be praying for. But I can pray my groans. John Stott wrote, "The indwelling Spirit gives us joy, and the coming glory gives us hope, but the interim suspense gives us pain... Our groans express both present pain and future longing. Some Christians, however, grin too much and groan too little." It's okay to groan. This world is

broken and it hurts. When we don't know what to pray, the Holy Spirit lifts prayers for us. "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 through wordless groans." (Romans 8:26) The Spirit groans. Did you see that? God groans. We groan together in pressing, uncomfortable expectation that this all will be put right in the end. Along the way we have this comfort, God is at work. God is not absent. God is for us, not against us. "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." (Romans 8:28) This is comfort for groaning times. This is the cool, soft body pillow we need when we are uncomfortably pregnant with hope for the restoration of all things. Trust the Lord. God is at work. The story is not over. God works for the good, in all things. I know my origin; I know my destination. The good of those who love him.

You might recognize these closing verses as some of the strongest on predestination in all of Scripture. God has known what he was doing all along! We will talk more about predestination as we get into chapter nine. Whenever we are granted a glimpse of the plan of salvation from God's point of view, it presents us with unanswerable mysteries. For now, just know, this is not an attack on God's character or fuel for pride among the saved. This is joy and comfort. God is in charge, and our salvation, ultimately is not dependent on our performance or choices. God has this. "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." (Romans 8:29-30) There is no point in that chain of events in which we turn back and say pridefully, "There

it is; that's when I accomplished my salvation." We can only say, "Thank you, God, my Savior."

So, everything stinks, everything is broken, the world is full of poison, God is still on the throne. We belong to him. The world belongs to him. He is working for the good. How then do we pray? What are you praying for? When I say we are praying for the renewal of creation, I'm talking about this birth process, this renewal that has been won by Christ who died to take the poison out of the system, has been proven by the resurrection, if death can be reversed then all this brokenness can be reversed, and the Holy Spirit within us—the first fruits—is the down payment, the earnest money. This is happening. We can know our origin—we were made by God. We can know our destination—we, and all this creation, will be remade anew. We can navigate our present. How then do we pray? Well, on the negative side, we understand that part of why this world is broken is that we broke it. Humanity was the first into disobedience and all creation fell with us. We can pray that God continues to show us ways to minimize the damage, repair the damage, bear witness to the beautiful, divine intent of creation at first and the promise of divine regeneration of creation at the last. Pray that way. And pray for the future hope

A few weeks ago, Dick Eastman went to be with the Lord. Dick Eastman devoted his whole life to increasing prayer ministry among Christians. He ran Every Home for Christ. He charged us to pray for an hour; he called it "the hour that changes the world." "To be faithful in prayer is to share with God in His plan to change the world... Beloved, it is not age, experience, talent, or material wealth that makes the difference in the destiny of men and nations. Prayer alone will change the world, from our neighbors to the nations." Well, we are not going to pray for an hour, but we are going to pray.

Of all the broken areas and categories of the world we live in, let's lift a few up to the Lord. Let's groan a bit. Let's allow the Spirit of God to pray for us in unspoken ways. Let's pray for our children and schools, for our arts and media, for our government and military, for our world at war, for our businesses, for our church and for strong ministries of Jesus, for our broken world that will one day be put right. In Jesus' name. Amen.