

Waiting with Eager Longing

July 19, 2026

Romans 8:12-25

¹² So then, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation, but it isn't an obligation to ourselves to live our lives on the basis of selfishness. ¹³ If you live on the basis of selfishness, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the actions of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ All who are led by God's Spirit are God's sons and daughters. ¹⁵ You didn't receive a spirit of slavery to lead you back again into fear, but you received a Spirit that shows you are adopted as his children. With this Spirit, we cry, "Abba, Father."

¹⁶ The same Spirit agrees with our spirit, that we are God's children. ¹⁷ But if we are children, we are also heirs. We are God's heirs and fellow heirs with Christ, if we really suffer with him so that we can also be glorified with him. ¹⁸ I believe that the present suffering is nothing compared to the coming glory that is going to be revealed to us.

¹⁹ The whole creation waits breathless with anticipation for the revelation of God's sons and daughters. ²⁰ Creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice — it was the choice of the one who subjected it — but in the hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from slavery to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of God's children. ²² We know that the whole creation is groaning together and suffering labor pains up until now.

²³ And it's not only the creation. We ourselves who have the Spirit as the first crop of the harvest also groan inside as we wait to be adopted and for our bodies to be set free. ²⁴ We were saved in hope. If we see what we hope for, that isn't hope. Who hopes for what they already see? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we don't see, we wait for it with patience.



In the two commentaries that I read this past week preparing for today's message, both started out with the same basic thought.

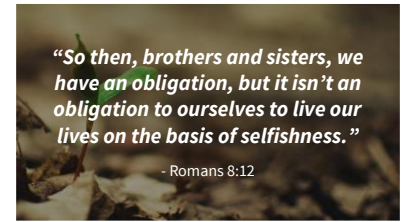
One author noted that any sentence in this dense passage is worthy of a whole sermon. The other noted that one could preach

a whole season's worth of sermons from the ideas and images found in these fourteen verses from Romans 8. Yes, there is a lot in these verses. So, today, buckle up. Prepare yourself mentally to maybe skip lunch. These rich, theologically powerful verses have so much to offer to us.

During this time together, however, I will just touch on the ideas and images that Paul brings to us today – enough to give you something to think about, enough to hopefully have you leaving here today wanting to read and think more about this passage. So, relax. Lunch is not really on the chopping block. But do prepare yourself to get an introduction to Paul's understanding of how we are connected to God, to one another, and to all of creation. As we ready ourselves to dive into Romans 8:12-25, let us begin with a word of prayer...

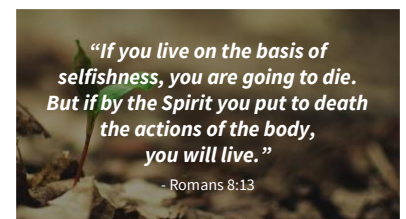
In you alone we put our hope, God the Father, creator and sustainer, who gives all good things seen and unseen. In you alone we put our hope, God the Son, savior and redeemer, who died for our sins and rose again. In you alone we put our hope, God the Spirit, teacher and comforter, who moves us to sing "Our God reigns!" In you alone we put our hope. And now, O God, I ask that you would bless the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts. You are our rock and our redeemer, our Christ and our king. Amen.

Please turn with me to Romans 8, beginning in verse 12. Here we read these words: *“So then, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation, but it isn’t an obligation to ourselves to live our lives on the basis of selfishness.”* These words, *“So then,”* connect back to the previous verses. In last week’s passage, Paul encouraged us to choose to live in the Spirit – as opposed to living in the flesh. We perhaps recall that his assumption was that we would choose to live in the Spirit. That is Paul’s *“so then.”* So then, since you will clearly choose to live in the Spirit, then here is our obligation: *“to NOT live our lives on the basis of selfishness.”* If the obligation is not to ourselves, then to whom are we obligated?



Although Paul will unpack the depth of our obligation as we work through the passage, I want to share to whom we are obligated right up front. We are obligated to God, to one another, and to creation. For Paul, he saw and understood a deep connection between all of the created world and the creator God. Paul focuses much of his teaching and writing on the development of connection and unity – one body, many parts... one together in Christ... many gifts, one purpose. This passage is no different. Since we have chosen to be brothers and sisters in Christ, then we have an obligation to live with and to treat one another – and creation and God – in certain ways, in ways that are selfless.

To live selflessly is what Paul is pointing at as he writes these words in the next verse. He begins with a warning but then gives us the better option: *“If you live on the basis of selfishness, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the actions of the body, you will live.”* This is another example of Paul’s duality. Be selfish and die. Or...



Die to being selfish and you will live. When we live selflessly, when we honor our connections to one another, to God, and to all of creation, it is then that we find true, joyful, abundant life. Living not for self, we are kinder and gentler with one another. Living faithfully in his world, we are willing to be generous and compassionate, which lifts others up and builds the connections between us. Living by the Spirit, we seek and are blessed by being in community and by finding belonging and worth within these communities of faith. Living selflessly, we do find that life becomes joyful, full, and abundant.

I was blessed to experience this kind of community this past week. With eighteen high schoolers and four other adults, we built community around our wilderness theme. As we talked about and worked through what wilderness was and about what it was like to be in the wilderness and about how to find our way out of the wilderness, we shared and were vulnerable with each other. We supported and encouraged and walked with one another. On Friday morning, it was hard to say goodbye to the community we had created. It was a really great week at camp.

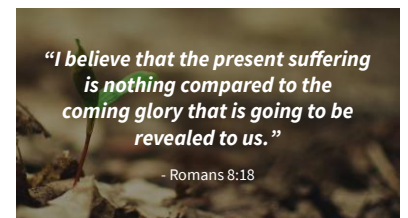
Paul begins to develop thoughts about this kind of connection and about what that means to live in true community as we turn to verse 14. First, our connection: *“All who are led by God’s Spirit are God’s sons and daughters.”* When we accept Jesus and allow the Holy Spirit to lead and guide our lives, we are living as God’s sons and daughters, as God’s children. Paul speaks into what it means to live as a child of God as we turn to verse 15. Here he reminds us that we *“didn’t receive a spirit of slavery to lead you back again into fear.”* As sons and daughters of God, we are no longer slaves to sin and death. To be held by these powers brings fear and worry and anxiety.

Instead, Paul reminds us, we *“received a Spirit that shows you are adopted as his children.”* We are not people living under a demanding and cruel judge. No, we are the children of a loving, gracious parent. Yes, there is accountability in our faith. But, no, we do not need to fear how our loving and gracious Father will treat us when we fall short of the mark set by Christ. This is where grace comes in. We’ll dive deeper into this next week as we close out Romans 8 with the message *“More Than Conquerors.”* You’ll have to wait until next week for it.



Paul also addresses the realities of living as a child of God in this broken and sinful world. This connects back to the idea of obligation. Paul begins verse 17 pointing out that if we are children of God, brothers and sisters to Christ, then we are also heirs to God and with Christ. Paul is talking about inheritance here. We not only inherit many blessings in this life and the final blessing of eternal life, but we also inherit the consequences of living faithfully in this present world. Paul puts it this way: *“if we really suffer with him so that we can also be glorified with him.”* If we are committed to following Christ, at times we will be obligated to suffer for our faith. Just as Christ suffered and was glorified, so too will we suffer at times in order to one day be glorified.

Paul next points out how worth it will be on that day in glory. In verse 18 Paul writes, *“I believe that the present suffering is nothing compared to the coming glory that is going to be revealed to us.”*



This is a promise that I often share at committal services. In those moments, when a final goodbye is being offered to the mortal body of a loved one, I often remind those gathered that this life does not begin to compare to the life to come. I share the thought that we may wonder then, on the other side, why it took so long to get to this glorious, heavenly home.

Paul then shifts gears in verse 19. He is returning to the idea of obligation. In verse 19 we read these words from Paul: *“The whole creation waits breathless with anticipation for the revelation of God’s sons and daughters.”* Waits with breathless anticipation –



when have you done that? We used to do it all the time at Christmas when our kids were really little. Early on Christmas morning we’d wait, holding our breath, waiting for those little heads to poke around the corner, seeing their presents under the tree for the first time.

I still do it now and then, when I’m giving what I think is a really special gift, waiting with held breath for the package to be opened. And I’ve waited this way in a hospital, as a loved one has been in surgery. When have you waited with a sense of breathless anticipation?

This passage isn’t about us, though. It is about creation. It is about creation waiting with held breath, with great anticipation – for the revelation of God’s children. This verse is about the created world waiting with breathless anticipation for you and I to begin living as children of God, treating the created world as God would treat it if God were here among us. In the scriptures we see that God’s plan is to one day restore everything – humanity and all of creation – back to the way it originally was in the Garden of Eden. Our job, my friends, is to decrease, not increase, the amount of work God will have to do in the restoration process.

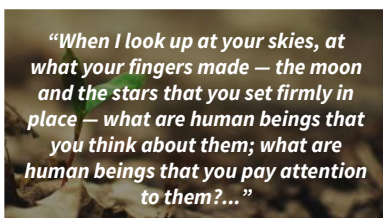
Here Paul is leaning into the idea that our salvation, that our restoration, is tied up in and is connected to creation’s salvation and restoration. The apostle is arguing that the fate of the world, the fate of the planet, is woven into our fate, into our future, into our hope.

We read about this in the next verse: *“Creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice — it was the choice of the one who subjected it.”* Paul is talking about us. We – collectively over the ages – we have often treated creation poorly. At many points in our common history, we have abused and exploited creation for our own gain. Paul wrote these words about 2,000 years ago. Imagine then, for a moment, how creation feels now in our present time.

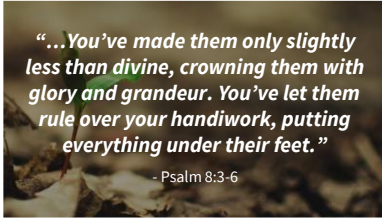
While creation is the work of God’s hand, creation itself is not God. While this is an important distinction to make, we must also acknowledge that we get a glimpse of God when we comprehend the created world. We better know the creator when we inspect and appreciate the creation. We better connect to the creator when we spend time in the created world. And, when we better understand God, we get a better sense of who and what we are created to be.

A sense of perspective often helps here. Standing on the edge of the Grand Canyon, one is humbled by the grandeur and beauty of the canyon. Walking along the beach, watching and feeling the pounding of the surf and the power of the waves’ movement, one feels small and a little bit helpless. One cannot stare up into the vast night sky and not feel like a small speck of dust. And, yet, we have an important role to play as the sons and daughters of God.

In Psalm 8 we read these words:



“When I look up at your skies, at what your fingers made — the moon and the stars that you set firmly in place — what are human beings that you think about them; what are human beings that you pay attention to them?”



You’ve made them only slightly less than divine, crowning them with glory and grandeur. You’ve let them rule over your handiwork, putting everything under their feet.”

Yes, God loves us, cares for us, blesses us, honors us, and gives us power over the created world. Power over – these can be dangerous words. Coupled with ideas of being only slightly less than divine and of being crowned with glory and grandeur, the idea of ruling over the created world can lead us down a bad path. It certainly has in the past. But we have come to understand that dominion or power or authority over is not about abusing or exploiting or using and casting aside. In the Genesis creation story, and as reiterated here by the psalmist, our role, again, is to care for the planet as God would care for the planet. It is a charge to be mindful about what we do and how we do it when creation is concerned. When we truly grasp our charge to care well for this world, we are connecting to God and who and what God calls us to be.



Earlier I talked about connecting to and getting to better understand God in the grandeur and vastness and power of canyons, oceans, and the night sky. But it can also happen in the small, every day of life. Working on this message two Thursdays ago, because I was about to spend the next week at camp, it rained. It was a steady, good rain. As I sat back for a few minutes at my desk and watched the rain fall, I was struck by how the rain revealed God’s love for this planet and for those who dwell in this created world, specifically for me that day. In a personal way, I felt a strong touch of God’s love for me and for our world. I felt connected to God and to the created world in that moment as the rain fell.

Returning to our passage, in verses 20 and 21 we are reminded that creation waits in breathless anticipation *“with hope.”* Creation longs to be set free from decay and to be *“brought into the glorious freedom of God’s children.”* Paul is talking about creation no longer being subjected to humanity’s selfish and harmful behaviors. He is again speaking of us – of God’s children – treating creation itself as a brother or sister in Christ. Creation waits with eager longing for us – for Christians – to love and care well for the created world.

Even more so than waiting with anticipation, Paul states that *“the whole creation is groaning together and suffering labor pains up until now.”* Just as we wait at times for God to bring healing and wholeness to our lives, so too does creation wait. Wholeness and restoration and ultimately salvation have been a long time coming for the created world. Those labor pains – creation’s yearning for wholeness and healing – they are expressed in what Paul describes as “groans.” During moments of long suffering, I have emitted a groan or two now and then. It is not a great stretch of the imagination then to imagine the created world groaning as it awaits the day when God will make all things new.

Moving on to verse 23, Paul returns to us, to humanity. Here we writes, *“And it’s not only creation.”* We too wait with eager longing, with breathless anticipation at times. This duality is part of our reality too. We live in the here and now – and we look forward to the day when we will enter into eternal glory. This second half is a part of what Paul is talking about in verse 23. In the second half of verse 23 Paul offers these words: *“We ourselves who have the Spirit as the first crop of the harvest also groan inside as we wait to be adopted and for our bodies to be set free.”*



Yes, we who have been indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we who have are sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, we too groan as we await the day when we will be made fully whole, when we will be completely restored, when we will experience our final salvation. My friends, do you groan, do you long for the day when you will be made whole as you stand in Christ's glorious presence? I think we all do.

But there is also a here and now aspect to these words. In truth, we have already been adopted. We are already the beloved sons and daughters of our God most high. There is nothing unfinished in God's claim on you and me as heirs in the kingdom of God. We live this reality out every day. This is what allows us, as Paul says, to wait with hope, to wait with eager longing, and "*to wait with patience.*" Hope is not about wishing for the future. Hope is about living in faith and with trust in the one who is present to us right now.



We hope that the Son will return one day to take us home and to restore all of creation to wholeness and abundant life. We hope in trust, knowing that Christ is already among us and in us. We wait with eager longing and with patience, knowing in our hearts that one who holds all things in his hands is faithful and true. Thanks be to God. Alleluia and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. Obligation, suffering, groaning – not exactly positive words. Yet, how have these experiences led to growth in your faith? Why does faith often work in this way?
- 2) *Pray*. Fear often leads us to do or say things in order to preserve self or to feel secure. What fears do you have that inhibit your trust and faith in God? Turn these over to God in prayer, seeking to give control over to the Lord.

- 3) *Study.* Read 1st Peter 1:3-9. How does Peter echo Paul's words about hope and trust?
What does this passage add to your faith and trust in the Lord?