

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

# The DEVO

JULY 11 - 15, 2022



# LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

Pentecost Series  
Jun 12 - Aug 7

# MONDAY

Read **Romans 8:22**

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## Anticipation

Paul continues the thought introduced in Romans 8:18-21 by using the metaphor of childbirth to describe how the whole of Creation anticipates God's transformation of our present order. The metaphor of childbirth is a helpful one with several clear connections to the theological truth Paul is explaining.

Firstly, childbirth is a time of waiting with an inevitable outcome, the birth of a child (or children). Just as a parent does not know exactly when the birth will occur, God's Creation does not know when He will finally and fully liberate Creation from the bondage to decay and bring it to full freedom and glory. But just as a parent knows the day will eventually arrive, so there is certainty that God will do as He has promised.

Secondly, the birthing process is a painful process, full of many discomforts. In a similar way, Paul describes Creation as "*groaning ... right up to the present time.*" This world's bondage to decay results in much suffering. We recognize this in our own bodies as well as in the creation around us. Plants and animals die due to lack of water and nutrients, due to extreme weather events, or due to pests and disease. Humans also suffer physical and cognitive decline as we age. We, like Creation, are groaning under the effects of the curse.

Finally, the result of childbirth is something incredibly beautiful—a new life! We all recognize that while the newborn baby is new, there is also clear continuity between the child and the parents. “She has your eyes.” “He has your smile.” The continuity described in the previous verse is “*liberation from decay*” and “*the freedom and glory of the children of God*” (Romans 8:21). God’s promise is not something radically new but rather a promise to remake everything as He intended them to be. Liberation. Freedom. Glory.

What a marvelous future God has promised us. Even though our world is still subject to decay, oppression, and suffering, Paul affirms that Creation anticipates God’s liberating and glorious future. His promises are certain. Creation’s future is secure. As humans, God gave us the responsibility to be stewards of His Creation (Genesis 1:26-30). Our stewardship should be informed by God’s plan to liberate His Creation.

## QUESTIONS

What is something you greatly anticipated? What does it mean for us to care for Creation in anticipation of God’s promised freedom?

## PRAVERS AND PRAISES

### For Pars Theological Centre

**Praises.** After a long, multi-year effort by its small, dedicated staff and faculty, Pars Theological Centre’s curriculum was accredited by the European Council for Theological Education!! Pars is the first Iranian school to offer accredited degrees in Theology and Leadership that are fully designed and produced by its own staff and faculty.

# TUESDAY

Read Romans 8:23

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## Firstfruits

After initially focusing on Creation's anticipation of the liberation God has promised, Paul shifts his focus to a similar anticipation by God's children. At its essential core, Paul's statement is that we ourselves "*groan inwardly*." The point is that humans, like Creation itself, live in anticipation of God's promised future. But embedded in this fundamental statement is the description of us as those "*who have the firstfruits of the Spirit*" (Romans 8:23).

The concept of firstfruits can be traced back to Israel's agrarian society and God's command to His people to honor Him at a Festival of Harvest by bringing the firstfruits of their harvest to His house (Exodus 23:16, 19). The firstfruits were a sign of what was to come, a foretaste of the full harvest. Somewhat less straightforward is the qualifier, "*of the Spirit*."

Scholars have debated whether Paul means the firstfruits *come from* the Spirit or the Spirit *is* the firstfruits. Consider for a moment the expression, "box of wood." Does this mean a box full of wood or a box made of wood (i.e., a wooden box)? Either meaning is possible, and one would have to determine the intended meaning from the context. The same applies to Paul's statement, "*firstfruits of the Spirit*." In several

other instances Paul refers to the Spirit as a “*deposit, guaranteeing what is to come*” (2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5) or a “*deposit guaranteeing our inheritance*” (Ephesians 1:14). In view of such usages, it seems clear that he is using a similar expression here: the Spirit is the firstfruits we have been given by God as His pledge to us of His promised future.

Thinking of the Spirit in this way has several implications. Firstly, the Spirit is God’s gift to us, which is a reversal of the concept from the Old Testament. As noted in Exodus, the firstfruits were to be given by the people to God to express thankfulness. But now God has given to us the Spirit as a pledge of His promised future. Secondly, the Spirit helps us experience God’s promised future in the present. The love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control given to us by the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23; i.e., *the fruit of the Spirit*) allow us to experience the transformation God intends for us. With the Spirit, God’s promised future has arrived.

## QUESTIONS

What evidence do you see of the Spirit’s work in your life?

## PRAVERS AND PRAISES

### For Pars Theological Centre

**Prayer.** Pray for two of Pars’ Afghan students who have decided to remain in Afghanistan with their families in spite of cruel religious persecution. It is remarkable that in the midst of the recent horrific economic and political climate, students have said there is a new openness to the gospel in Afghanistan.

# WEDNESDAY

Read **Romans 8:23**

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## Adoption

Yesterday we noted that, like Creation, God's people groan inwardly; that is, we live in anticipation of God's future. The object of our anticipation is found in the second half of verse 23: "*... we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.*" Earlier in this chapter Paul has spoken about God's adoption of believers as an accomplished fact: "*... the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship*" (Romans 8:15). So why now does he say that we are eagerly waiting for God's adoption?

The solution seems to lie in Paul's understanding of salvation as a dynamic process that has past, present, and future dimensions. At times, Paul focused on the past dimension and the fact that his readers *were saved* by God's grace (e.g., Romans 5:1-2). At other times, he focused on the present dimension that his readers *were being saved* (e.g., Philippians 2:12-13). When he focused on the future dimension of salvation, he looked forward to our experience of resurrection and being fully in the presence of God.

Paul's statement in verse 23 fits into the last category. When children are adopted into a family, they become daughters or sons of the parents. Their status as a member of the family is secure.

They will experience many benefits of adoption, but the full benefits will only be realized when someday they receive an inheritance. In a similar manner, Paul says that as believers we have been adopted, but we also eagerly await the fullness of our adoption, which is the redemption of our bodies.

The promise of redeemed bodies is something about which we all can get excited. We all have experienced physical limitations and the effects of illness, disease, injuries, and/or age. Some of us have also experienced challenges related to disabilities with which we were born. Paul's vision for our full salvation includes the eager hope that our Savior "*will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body*" (Philippians 3:21). What an amazing experience that will be! Given such a future, how can we help but "*wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies*"?

## QUESTIONS

What physical limitations or challenges are you or a loved one currently facing? How does the prospect of this future redemption of our bodies help us cope with such life experiences?

## PRAYERS AND PRAISES

### For Pars Theological Centre

**Prayer.** Pray for two students who were arrested a few months ago. They have since been released on bail. There is the possibility that the intelligence service will raise new accusations against them and try to alter the judge's decision. Please continue to pray and intercede for them.

# THURSDAY

Read **Romans 8:24**

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## Hope

Having clarified that believers, along with the whole of Creation, live in eager expectation of God's future fulfillment of His promises, Paul proceeds to focus on the hope that this expectation entails.

Firstly, he affirms that this is the hope in which we were saved. Paul is not introducing a new hope to his readers, but simply clarifying for them the nature of the hope he has proclaimed all along. In chapter 4 he affirmed that Abraham's faith was characterized by hope: "*Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed ...*" (Romans 4:18). He also noted that suffering produces hope in us through the work of the Holy Spirit in us as we suffer for God's glory (Romans 5:1-5).

The very concept of salvation is a concept that is hope-filled. Salvation means recognizing that I need God to rescue me from the judgment I deserve because of my personal sinfulness. Salvation means believing God offers me a better, brighter future that I cannot achieve apart from Jesus' death on the cross. Salvation means looking forward to the work that God has promised to complete through His resurrection and transformative power. Indeed, hope characterizes every aspect of our salvation.



Paul then states what seems to be the obvious when he says, “*But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?*” (Romans 8:24). Applying this statement to our own context, most of us do not hope for running water, indoor plumbing, or a place to call home. The homeless within our society and many people around the world hope for such things, but there is little need to hope for such things for most of us living in the San Gabriel Valley because we already have them.

Paul’s point is that if we already experienced God’s salvation in its fullness—if we already possessed resurrection bodies, if we already were fully present with God, if we already lived completely in step with God’s Spirit—there would be no need for hope. The fact that this is not our present reality means that hope is still essential for our faith. Elsewhere, Paul told his readers that hope is one of three enduring virtues (1 Corinthians 13:13): we live by faith, in hope, resulting in love.

## **QUESTIONS**

What do you currently hope for? How closely are your hopes aligned with the objects of hope that Paul describes?

## **PRAYERS AND PRAISES**

**For Pars Theological Centre**

**Prayer.** Pray for all students studying with Pars this semester. Pray that they will find the right balance between their ministries, home life and studies. Pray for this process of transformation as their education is integrated into their heads, hearts and hands.

# FRIDAY

Read **Romans 8:25**

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## Patience

Paul's conclusion to this week's text is stated quite simply: "*But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently*" (Romans 8:25). If we exclude the last word, the statement is self-evident: if we hope for something, then we wait for it. This reaffirms Paul's prior statement that we do not hope for that which we already have. But the operative word in today's verse is the final word: we wait for it patiently.

If we know something will happen in the future, we have no choice but to wait for it. If those we trust promise us something good in the future, but they have not yet fulfilled their promise, we must wait for them to do so. But *how* we await the fulfillment of such a promise is our choice. Will I await the fulfillment of the promise anxiously? Will I be angry that the promise has not yet been fulfilled? Will I attempt to manipulate the timing of the fulfillment by trying to force the other person's hand? Will I doubt their good intentions or their ability to do as they have promised? All these possible responses betray a lack of faith and hope in the other person. Only by exercising true faith and hope am I able to wait patiently for the fulfillment of the promise.

Paul encourages his readers that the appropriate response to God's promised future is to wait patiently for God to fulfill His promises. Even though, along with Creation, we groan inwardly for the glorious liberation from decay and the freedom God has promised, even though the life-giving Spirit is at work within us, even though we have certain promises of God about the redemption of our bodies, until God decides to complete His promised work of salvation, we should wait patiently.

Waiting patiently is difficult when we see suffering, death, and brokenness continuing to affect us and the world in which we live. Sometimes we may find ourselves like the psalmist imploring God with the question, "How long, O LORD?" (Psalm 13:1). How long must we suffer? How long must we endure this broken world? How long until you put all things right? Patiently waiting does not mean refusing to ask such questions, but continuing to trust God's goodness, love, and power in the face of such questions.

## QUESTIONS

How can we exercise patient, hope-filled waiting this week?

## PRAYERS AND PRAISES

For Pars Theological Centre

**Prayer.** Pray for Pars' upcoming Formation Conferences in Turkey. These week-long conferences are held at secret locations to avoid Iranian persecution. Pray for the students attending, the lecturers and counsellors involved in facilitating this time with Pars' students.



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