Good morning Life Fellowship. My name is Dan and I am one of the pastors at Life.

He was a regular guy who had high hopes and big ambitions. He grew up in upstate New York, went to a college that almost no one had ever heard of, studied law, graduated, then decided that he was going to start a law firm in Albany, New York. And two years after his very uninspiring law practice had been opened, the building it was in burned to the ground and everything that he had there was gone.

So he went to Wisconsin thinking he would start over. He set up a practice there and it was a complete failure. So he went back to New York. His brothers moved to California and they told him to come out there and they would help him get started. He moved to California and went into business with his brothers. The business failed so he moved back to New York.

Has your life ever seemed to be like that? Where it seems like the harder you try the more difficult it becomes? And the high hopes and aspirations that you have all of a sudden seems like even if you could attain them it almost isn’t worth it because the struggle has been so hard. And yet deep down in your heart, there is that hope, that hope that things can get a little better, that maybe tomorrow there will be a fresh start, that maybe the tide is about to turn.

Well, this gentlemen decided after he returned to New York for the third time he was going to give it another shot. He had been to California doing business with his four brothers and he had gotten into a new industry that people were talking about. It was called the railroad. Before long this guy who had come from a nobody school in a tiny town from upstate New York, who had seen his law practices rise and fall, who had lost everything, was going to try again. And he became the president of a railroad. He became the governor of California. He ran for the United States Senate and won.

Things were finally going his direction, and he was feeling on top of the world. He felt like everything was going for him at last and his hope had been realized. He became wealthy beyond his dreams. He wanted his only child, a teenage son, who had been named after him, to be able to travel the world. So he sent his son to Europe and while he was in Florence, Italy his son caught typhoid fever and died.

And all that he had earned, and all that he had attained now mattered not at all. And in grief and mourning he took his money and he started a fund. He said he wanted others to be educated since his own son would never get the chance. This guy’s name was Leland Stanford. You may have heard of his school, Stanford University in California. Out of ashes, hope, victory and defeat, all the ups and downs of Leland Stanford’s life, we still remember his name because of the end result.
We have been studying Romans Chapter 8 now for three weeks. We know that Paul wrote to the church at Rome, and we have been looking at the way he was unfolding the Christian journey for two groups of people that made up the church at Rome. First and foremost were the guys that he knew as brothers, the Jewish believers. Those who had trusted Christ after being introduced to Him, and now had been called into a walk with Him. These guys who had grown up in the thick of Jewish culture, Jewish religion and Jewish tradition were now navigating their way uncertainly to this new world of grace that had rejected the law for what it could not do.

And so primarily in these passages that we have studied we see Paul addressing his brothers while the other group that were in the church were Gentiles. These were the guys that didn’t even know what the law was, they knew that some people lived by rules and whatever but that didn’t apply to them because they weren’t Jews. They lived by different standards and different codes and they were very narcissistic. They were very self-centered and very much into their own hedonistic type pleasures. Now they have trusted Christ and they looked at the law as representing holiness and something that they wanted to attain in Christ.

So primarily Paul in the first part of the book is addressing his brothers and later on he is going to more or less address the Gentiles while the Jewish brothers are listening. But in the end he is saying that when you trust Christ as your Savior the law changes its effect in your life. From that moment you are headed in a new direction and that direction is a journey.

We said it was called justification when we accept Christ. All things are brought into alignment with Christ. Everything is paid, all our debt is forgiven and then we are heading to that point in the future which we will talk a little bit about today that is called glorification. Glorification is that time when Jesus changes us from top to bottom, we don’t struggle with the old things, the old flaws, or all the other nonsense that seems to come into our lives because of sin. That is going to be erased in an act called glorification. And in between is this process called sanctification whereby we have been talking about transformation. Where we put off the old man and we put on the new man and we are walking toward that time when Jesus will wipe it all away.

Paul is telling us that we have a journey that we are on, a journey of sanctification, a journey of setting ourselves apart for God. It is a journey of trying to be as much like Christ as we can be considering the remnants of sin that we still struggle with every day.

When we began we looked at the fact that Paul said there was no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, and that was great because that provided us freedom from
the law. And then we learned last week that there is no obligation. We don’t fight for victory, we fight from victory. We are not obligated to sin, we are not obligated to the way that we are preprogrammed physically. Rather, because the Holy Spirit lives within us, if we pay attention to Him, if we walk in the Spirit, if we listen, then we can be freed from all that the law is constantly reminding us of.

And then today we are talking about hope. You know one of the most frustrating things in life is to have hope dashed, or hope unavailable, or even hope missing. And hope is the very reason why we get out of bed in the morning. Hope is that cause for which we realize this day is as it is, but tomorrow can be better. It is discouraging to live a life without hope.

And so Paul is speaking primarily at this point to the Jews. You remember the Jews had thousands of years of difficulty. God had told Abraham He was going to make of him a people that was going to be so many people Abraham wouldn’t be able to number them, they would be like the sand of the seashore, and as the stars in the sky. He told Abraham He was going to raise out of him a great nation. And from that moment the Jews felt themselves set apart and special. It was through the Jewish race that the Messiah would come. It was through the Jewish race that the world would be redeemed. It was through the Jewish race that reconciliation with God would occur.

And yet every step of the way has been a battle. It would be two steps forward and ten steps back. It was bondage, it was disease, it was wanderings, it was being aliens in foreign countries so it was a constant struggle to be a Jew. So of all people, these guys could have felt like there was no hope, it was just part of their culture. They were always being scattered, always being taken over, always being ridiculed, always being hated, always being fought against.

And Paul’s message to them was that in Christ all that they had been going through could now make sense because in Christ you can have hope. And I want you to understand something. Maybe you can relate to where the Jews were at that time because of something you are going through, or something that has occurred in your life to make your path dark right now, or maybe you are just struggling with just the everyday existence of walking in Christ and trying to take care of your family. You want to be a good wife or husband, you want to be successful at business or you want to get through school, or you want to have a little bit socked away so that you are not dependent on others, or you would like to have good health.

Whatever it is, all the things that may be causing you to struggle in your life, you need to understand that in the end we have hope. We have the hope that Jesus provided at Calvary, and it gives us direction. It gives us the reason to get out of bed every
morning. I want to talk about that with you this morning because when we live in hope it changes our perspective on everything. And when we live without hope, if you know Christ, you do so unnecessarily. You miss the part of the relationship with Christ that gives you the privilege of knowing that in the end God is glorified in every single thing that happens to us.

So we are going to be looking at Romans Chapter 8 again this morning and we will begin reading in verse 18. Hope is always unseen by its very definition. You can’t draw a picture of hope. You can’t take a picture of it with your camera. Hope is most difficult to have during bad times and yet it is most important to have during bad times. It is what keeps us from chucking it all, from giving up, from throwing in the towel.

And you know even the non-believer who doesn’t know Christ has hope. They have hope that there is meaning in life. They have hope that there is purpose, that they can make a difference. This hope is part of how God has created us. And when you lose hope, when you think this is all there is, that nothing you do matters (I use an apologetic moment here and a philosophical moment) and that is called nihilism.

Nihilism is the belief that nothing really matters beyond this moment, and that all of life is about the very moment in which we live. It is the nihilists who believe that doing things productive is meaningless. Art is meaningless. Work is meaningless. Love is meaningless. So they live in that exact moment, and the reality is the nihilist often leads a life that leads to complete emptiness, and often suicide. You can see it sometimes in artists who always seem to evoke negativity or depression or darkness. Guys like Kurt Cobain, if you were a child of the 80’s and early 90’s. He was the kind of guy that was a nihilist and we know how that ended for him.

But we don’t have to live that way, because our hope is an eternal hope. And everything that you and I do today has potential for good. Most of us hope for things like happiness, contentment or material possessions. And we think that if we have stuff, or if we feel good then we can be happy and that is where our hope lies. And yet for those of us who know Christ we know that happiness is fleeting, happiness can disappear from moment to moment. You can be happy in the morning, have a financial crisis in the afternoon, and be absolutely hopeless in the evening if your hope is always on stuff.

You can be hopeful and happy in the morning with your health and so forth, go to the doctor and get your blood taken, get a call in the afternoon and be told you have cancer or something, and all that happiness in the morning suddenly turns to despair in the evening. Happiness is not where our hope should lie. Our hope should lie in Christ. As I said last week, and I want to emphasize again today, God is not nearly as interested in our happiness as He is in our holiness. And when we walk with God and when we
know Him, when we please and honor Him, and do what we were created to do, we glorify God. And in that we have purpose, we have reason and we have hope.

So let’s look at this passage if we can. As we move toward that state of glorification in the future we know that walking in the Spirit, being led by the Spirit is what requires us to walk in attention to what God is doing in us and through us. And it is that awareness, as we talked about last week, that gives us hope regardless of the circumstances, because we know that we are walking in victory. We are not fighting for it, we are walking in freedom, we are not in bondage.

Let’s begin in verse 18 of Chapter 8. “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time.” ‘Hang on, Dan, I thought you were talking about hope? And look what we read right off of the bat.’ By the way, here is an exercise that I almost put on Facebook last week and I kind of regret now that I didn’t. But when you go through your Bible with your pen, circle words that are repeated, and see if you get the themes, because there are several things that are repeated here, and there are a couple of themes that we don’t want to miss in this process. God repeats what He wants us to notice so kind of pay attention as we read through this. We will be reading verses 18 through 30.

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it; in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.”

“And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”

“And He who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among
many brothers. And those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified.”

That key word as we end there tells us we are moving toward glorification. Now maybe you look at this passage and you think, ‘Wow, that is deep, that is intense. I am going to have a little trouble navigating this.’ But really you are not because as we kind of walk through this, pieces and parts are going to fall into place, and you will get it. And you are going to feel good about it.

So let’s get started. In the first part of these verses here what we see is this word ‘groaning’ used several times. And that brings us to this first thought - it is unrealistic to expect a life that does not have periods of groaning in it. It is just unrealistic. The other day I was with a guy who was in his 30’s. I had already gotten in the car and as he got in the car he groaned loudly. Now those of us who are over 40, we know that sound, don’t we? That sound we make when we get out of our recliner. I don’t know if it helps to groan when you are getting up but I can’t help but do it.

The other day I was trying to get the recliner down so I could get up to do something and my 20 year old son was waiting for me. I was fiddling with the lever and I thought what I really need is one of the chairs that kind of launches you up. When you move the lever it just pops you up. Someone ought to invent that and go on Shark Tank, that would really work. But I am moving the lever and finally my son said, ‘Dad, just grab my hand.’ This kid doesn’t have an ounce of body fat on him, he is like a walking muscle man, so he takes my hand and he pulls me up just about jerking my arm out of socket - and I groaned. My body was not prepared for all that sudden motion and I groaned and he is muttering something like, ‘You sound like an old man.’ And I said, ‘Well, I am an old man.’

And the fact is our bodies groan. They groan because of the ravages of aging - thank you, Adam. They groan because of the consequences of sin. Several years ago I went to a hospital to do some visiting, and outside on the sidewalk there was a guy that was sitting in a wheelchair. He looked like he was 70 or 80 years old and I later found out that he was in his 40’s. And one of the most disturbing things I had ever seen was he was smoking outside because he wasn’t allowed to smoke in the hospital, and he had this little hole in his throat and he was smoking a cigarette through the hole in his throat.

And you know he never smoked his first cigarette years before and said, ‘I can’t wait until the day when I look 40 years older than I really am and I have to go outside in my wheelchair and smoke my cigarette through a hole in my throat.’ But there he was. And the series of choices he had made brought him to these consequences. It was very obvious that he didn’t have very long to live.
We start businesses only to see them fail. We begin school only to find it is tough. We begin reading books but find it impossible to finish them. And so we groan, ‘Oh man, I wish I had more time. Oh man, I wish I felt better today. Oh man, I wish I had some more money. Oh man, I wish I hadn’t dropped out of school. Oh man, I wish these kids weren’t driving me crazy.’ And that’s the way we are. Before we had kids it was like, ‘Oh man, I want kids so badly.’ Then after you have them it is, ‘Oh man, why did I want to have kids?’ We just go back and forth. We just groan, don’t we?

And the Scripture tells us that of course we groan. It is the consequence of living in a fallen creation. And then Paul makes the point. Look in verse 22 again. “For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.” If you have ever watched a woman give birth, you know that in that moment it is such intense pain. You know that if you are the husband standing beside her and trying to offer support that there are going to be moments where she looks at you with sheer hatred in her eyes as she goes through this. ‘How did this happen? It is your fault.’ But then what happens the moment after they take that little bundle that is squirming and making rude noises and place it on her chest? All that pain evaporates. The horror of the pain of childbirth is replaced by the hope of a little life.

Our whole creation groans, but here is the cool thing. It doesn’t groan as one who is dying, but it is groaning as one who still has hope. The hope of childbirth, the hope of a future, the hope of a new start. We have heard a lot this week about the Paris Accord and our President’s decisions and so forth, and I am not going to get anywhere near the political side of that this morning, so relax. But it doesn’t take a rocket scientist to look and see the consequences of a fallen creation wherever we look. Whether it is garbage on the side of the road, or being in a city where you can’t even see across the street because of the smog, or whether you see polluted waters, or dead animals on the side of the road that have struck by automobiles - creation groans.

And by the way I will step in this far politically, we as Christians have been given charge over the earth. We should be good stewards of the earth. And you don’t have to be an extremist at all to believe that we have a responsibility to clean up after ourselves and to care about the place where we live. It is not ours, it is a gift from God for us to enjoy, and we should not want to abuse that gift. Okay, I will get off.

But the fact is Scripture tells us that the fall of man created a series of consequences whereupon even creation itself groans. Did you know that California is now 13 acres larger than it was last month? They had a landslide and a mountain fell off into the ocean and 13 acres worth of new land appeared. I understand they have already taxed it twice. But the fact is mountain are falling apart, and earthquakes happen, and floods come, and hurricanes ravage and creation groans, because of the consequences of
sin. Can we have hope? Or are we just waiting for that day whenever the news comes on and says, ‘Oh by the way, scientists missed this giant asteroid that is headed right toward us. You have 15 minutes to make peace because here it comes.’

No, no, that is not us, because we have hope. The hope that God’s word promises, the hope of childbirth, the hope that the best is yet to come. And we know the Scriptures tell us that one day there is going to be a new heaven and a new earth. We know that God is going to remove the vestiges of sin, those things, those remnants that have made life so difficult for many in parts of the world that we have never visited, and where we probably couldn’t last ten minutes in their circumstances. Yet we complain about little things while people today are wondering if they are going to have anything to eat all day long. Creation is groaning.

You understand what I mean if you have ever been to Calcutta, well it isn’t called Calcutta anymore, but in India where the slums are. As far as the eye can see all you will see are homes that are built out of cardboard and plywood and scraps. If you have ever been to the gypsy camps across Europe, Romania and Bulgaria, you will have seen people literally living in their own filth and squalor. If you have ever gone up to the mountains of Asia you will have seen people who have been living in dirt for century after century. And we come back to America and our nice palatial homes and complain because the air conditioning isn’t working quite right.

We don’t get it, but creation groans. Creation hurts. And the fact is it is unrealistic to expect a life on a fallen planet with fallen men and women to not experience periods of groaning. Look in verse 23 where it says, “And not only the creation, but we ourselves.” Now who are the ‘we’ Paul is talking about? He is very specific, “who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

Note this - he is only talking to believers here. This isn’t a letter for the general public. And he is saying two things to us. One of them is, ‘Hey Christians, you aren’t exempt from groaning. You are going to face it too. Things are going to go wrong in your life.’ This is the thing that kind of concerns me, particularly with the American church because let’s be honest, we all are aware that we are spoiled rotten. We really are. I said a couple of weeks ago one of the cool things that we were able to do was raise enough money for the Bibles that we were trying to send to Thailand and we are going to build a couple of church buildings for villagers there. But here is the other side of that. Yes, we are going to build a couple of church buildings, but they aren’t going to have chairs and they are not going to have carpeting. And they are not going to have over a half million dollars of lighting, video screens, and so on. They aren’t going to have paved parking and definitely no air conditioning.
So what are they going to have? Well they are going to have four walls made out of bamboo and a roof made out of palm fronds and a floor made out of dirt, maybe concrete. And they are going to be as excited on their first day as we were on our first day in our new building. But we have this attitude in this country that to suffer for Jesus is to have someone mock us in the breakroom. And we really don’t know what suffering is like.

Today there are believers who have sat in cells in parts of the world for years, wondering if anyone even remembers their name. But given the opportunity to deny Christ they will look into the face of their oppressors one more time and say, ‘I will not. I will not.’ There are people today who wait for the executioner knowing that unless something happens they will face a day when they will be dragged out of their home or dragged out of their cell, blindfolded and beheaded or hanged. And we complain because we are inconvenienced. Someone took my parking spot. Or we don’t like the way the parking attendant directed us to park because we had to walk all the way across.

See those things ought to make us pause. What makes you groan? What is it that reaches that level that inspires you to groan? I am such a baby, I really am. It is pretty pathetic. I have been on a diet since January 1st and you know whenever you are on a diet the whole world stops because you are on a diet - right? And every time I go to the gym I check in so everyone on Facebook knows that I am at the gym and I am disciplined. And it is because if you don’t Facebook then it didn’t happen - right?

So the other night we sat down for dinner and my wife had a salad and a sweet potato, because those carbs are apparently better than the white potatoes which I would really rather have, but I’ve learned that white is bad. I can’t have anything white like rice, potatoes, pasta or bread. ‘Oh, I am groaning. Believe me I am groaning.’ So my wife made some vegetables and she made a salad and she made a sweet potato. And then she had this big bowl of bread and this great looking meat that was breaded and fried. It was like you can have these things but not these other things. And she had sweet tea which I love, plus dessert. And I said, ‘Well, we didn’t have dessert when I wasn’t on a diet, so why are we serving dessert now that I am on a diet?’

It’s like my wife wants to build my character or something. And I whined like a 6 year old girl. ‘I’m trying to live longer so that you can have a husband.’ Uh oh, maybe there is a method behind this now that I think about it. But we groan over the silliest things, don’t we? And it makes me kind of wonder what would I do in the face of starvation, or what would I do in the face of spiritual opposition. If someone not treating me right at church will cause me to quit church and quit God, how in the world would I ever make it in China? How would I ever make it in North Korea? How would I ever make it in Saudi Arabia? If having the lights on or the music too loud, or whatever it is
will make me say, ‘I am just done with this. I am just leaving.’ If that is the extent to which my groaning begins, God forbid that I ever face the groanings of a creation that was marred by one who hated God and wanted His share.

I thought I had victory, but maybe I need to start acting like it. But the reality is we are going to groan and sometimes it is about superficial things and sometimes it is serious things. Before we end the service today we are going to take a special offering for a lady that is just one of the sweetest and most godly ladies I know. And if she lives to see Christmas it will be a miracle. She has a son who will be a senior this year and a son who will be 12 years old. She has no hair and she has tumors. And I look at that and my heart breaks, because you know sometimes life does stink. Death does come unfairly and the tears are real. And Satan is vicious.

Don’t expect to live a life that is all rainbows and unicorns when you are walking for Christ. In fact you may indeed find that the closer you walk with Christ the more legitimate groaning may come into your life. But there is something else I want you to see in verse 26 and I don’t want us to miss this. “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” This is a different kind of groaning, this is an empathic groaning. This is a groaning that God Himself experiences with us through the Holy Spirit.

Have you ever been in such a desperate situation, a desperate case where you wanted to pray and you didn’t even know how to pray? Have you ever been there? There have been times in my life when I was so confused, so hurt, so damaged by sin and circumstances that I knew I was supposed to pray. Right? “Pray without ceasing.” “Come boldly into the throne of grace.” I knew I was supposed to do it, and I would find myself presenting myself before the Lord ready to pray. I would bow my head and say, ‘God,’ and then stop because I didn’t know where to go from there. I didn’t know what to pray for. Should I pray for this? But if this happens, then that happens. Do I pray for that? Well if that happens, then this happens. I didn’t even know what was best for me right then. I didn’t know what I should be asking God for at this moment.

And here is the good news. When you are in that spiritual depression, when you are in that set of circumstances where it looks like everywhere you turn it is a catastrophe, remember God’s Holy Spirit lives in you and the Bible says intercedes for us. When you say intercede that means that there are two - right? For someone to intercede it has to be between two things, and so it is either two sets of circumstances, two people, two directions or whatever. So if I am here and the Holy Spirit is interceding for me, well who is over here? It is God. And He, the Holy Spirit is literally joining me in my pain as we communicate to the Father.
Now when we grasp that, and I know if you are not a Christ follower, that sounds really weird to you, it almost sounds mystical. But understand that there is such a thing as the mystery of God. I don’t always get it but I do know this, when I mediate on truth, and when I acknowledge God living in my life, when I remind myself that I am not the center of the universe, when I remember that point in my life when I said, ‘God, you got me. Do whatever you want to do with me whether I like it or not, good or bad, fast or slow, just use me.’ When I remember those things, all of a sudden I find my groanings diminish, as the Holy Spirit reminds me of truth, reminds me of hope, and gives me the comfort that only God’s word can give me.

And that intercession is a two way street. He represents us before God, but the Holy Spirit represents God to us as well, and in doing so we can have hope. Paul is saying to the Jews and the Gentiles at Rome that they have a tough life, they have had tough things going on, they are going to groan, and creation is going to groan, but in the midst of it they still have hope. Tim Keller said, “Suffering is a reminder that the world is not the way that it is supposed to be.”

Here is the second thing I want you to remember. The hope that is offered is for believers, the children of God, and not for those who are still under condemnation. The hope that is offered is for believers, the children of God. Now some may misunderstand this and I hope you don’t. Bear with me, okay? But I think sometimes we as Christians need to be careful and not buy into universalism as a thought, belief, philosophy or religion. Universalism is the belief that there are many paths to God, and that they all lead to Him, and that getting to God is a matter of effort and sincerity, not necessarily accuracy. And so if you are a Buddhist, or if you are a Muslim, or if you are a Christian and you are genuinely seeking God, everything turns out in the end. That is universalism in a very, very coarse diminishing type of definition.

And most of us who know Christ, who understand that Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but by me,” would reject universalism because it contradicts Scripture. The Bible talks about a wide path and a narrow path, and we believe that the narrow path is that path that we are on whereupon we have trusted Christ and His exclusive gift of eternal life that was purchased for us at Calvary. That is the essence of the gospel.

But sometimes our behavior, and even our thinking, belies the idea that we have kind of bought into this idea that we are all God’s children. How many times have we heard that, ‘Well, we are all God’s children?’ The fact is we are not all God’s children; some of us are the children of Satan. Maybe you wonder who that is. It is those who are walking in sin, those who are walking apart from Christ, those who do not have the Holy Spirit.
Maybe you are thinking that that is very exclusive. Why yes, it is. It is. Embrace it. It is very exclusive. But it is not exclusive to the point that you can’t come along. There is an open invitation. And if you will listen for God calling you and you respond, then He will save you. He has issued the invitation, “Look unto me and be you saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is none else.” “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” “That is thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Those are the words of God, they aren’t Dan’s words, or Life Fellowship’s terms; they are the words of God. And it is exclusive but there’s room for you. It is wrong for us to give false assurance to people who are not walking in truth, who do not know Christ, that everything is going to work out in the end, because for them the groanings of life, the groanings of a fallen creation, the groanings of sin are just the beginning of something awful. This life is brief and the terror that awaits those who do not know Christ is eternal.

We need to take this very seriously. We ought to take it so seriously that it just automatically flows out of us whenever we get a change to witness to someone. If you had the cure for cancer, and I had cancer, and you kept it to yourself and I found out about it, I would be a little ticked - right? Or what if I was hungry and I needed something to eat and I found out that you not only had a sandwich for yourself but you had an extra one and you didn’t bother to offer it to me, because you didn’t want to offend me. I am like, offend me, offend me.

So why would we have the gospel in our hearts, in our lives and we know it, yet we walk by people every day who would benefit from it. Now, I won’t have to take your sandwich if you offer it to me. I may or I may not. And people won’t necessarily take the gospel from you when you offer it to them, but at least offer it. At least tell them the difference that Christ has made in your own life.

You don’t have to be some kind of raving lunatic that stands out with a ‘repent’ sign on the street corner and screams at people when they go by. I mean who responds to that? But you know who you will respond to? A conversation over lunch when someone is telling you about how their world is falling apart and you tell them you remember a day when you were like that, and then share with them how you can go through bad times without losing your mind. No pressure, no manipulation, no guilt. Just tell them your story. And that folks, is presenting the gospel.
And I would like to ask you this question for you to reflect on today. When is the last time you shared your gospel story with anyone? Anyone? You know walking in the Spirit, being led by the Spirit, as we talked about last week, means acknowledging day by day that God lives in us. Do you think God is interested in redeeming people? We are His instruments then. So when is the last time you invited someone to follow Christ?

Adoption into God’s family changes our future and provides hope. The operative word there is ‘adoption.’ Can you imagine what it was like to be a Jew, a member of the chosen people, for them to hear from Paul, ‘Jews, remember this, adoption is required.’ Their response was probably something like this: ‘No, you don’t understand. I am a Jew, I am a son of Abraham. I was raised in this. I am one of the chosen race.’ And Paul would have said: ‘No, you misunderstand. That was through whom the Messiah was to come, but you still need to be adopted into God’s family, because the law didn’t give you that. Your birth didn’t give you that. Circumcision didn’t give you that. All these different efforts that you have made didn’t give you that. What gives you that is when God tells you He places you in His family.’

That is why it is called adoption because it is a legal transaction. And we become the sons of God through adoption. When that happens it changes our future and provides for our hope. I talked to an adult the other day who had been adopted as a child and they said this: “I often like to think about where I would be had I not been adopted by my mom and dad. I can’t even imagine what my life would have been like without them, but it can’t be as good as the one I have enjoyed through adoption.”

Folks, if you are walking outside of God’s family today, I just want to tell you that the adoption papers are ready and He wants you. Will you say yes to Him? God does not require us to go through difficulty alone, we have the Holy Spirit. He doesn’t require us to go through difficulty alone, we have the option of having the Holy Spirit. So whenever you are lost, whenever you are hurting, and you think no one cares, you are wrong. Jesus cares, so much that He will groan with you.

In God’s economy nothing occurs in a vacuum of meaninglessness. Look with me if you will at Romans Chapter 8 and verse 28. This is a verse that we have used so ferociously it is appalling. It says, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.” This verse is not simply a feel good verse that looks nice on your wall or on your desk. This verse is a statement of fact. It is not meant as a promise; it is a statement of fact. It is not a magic stone that you get to rub. It is not a rabbit’s foot. That is not what it means. It is just a simple statement of fact. This is why it is so important to understand the context here.
If you have studied theology at all it has been said that you have to watch out because a text without a context is a pre-text for a proof-text. What is a proof-text? A proof-text is when you pull a verse out and it doesn’t mean anything that it is really supposed to mean. For instance the verse, “If my people which are called by my name,” or “I know my thoughts toward you are good and not for evil,” those are pulled out of context verses because if you understood how they were given it meant something completely different. Another one that we like to use is, “Is there not a cause,” and it may make you feel good or give you goosebumps but in the end it is not accurate to what the Scripture is teaching in the right context.

And this verse 28 is one of those cases. It is not meant to be a lucky charm for you; this is a statement of fact. It means that in the midst of your groaning, in the midst of your trial it is a fact that God will be glorified and in that it is good. The fact is that God will be glorified. God is glorified by sin because it reminds us of His righteousness. God is glorified by our pain because it reminds us of the pain that He endured on the cross so that we could have salvation. God is glorified by death because He died for us and in His resurrection we have hope that there will be no death of the soul for those who know Christ. Everything that happens in our lives God will be glorified from it.

It is not a matter of hoping that it will happen; it is looking for it when it does happen. That is what it is for. You can have this confidence that whatever you are going through in your life at this moment in time, God will be glorified from it if you will pay attention. Maybe you are thinking, ‘Oh Dan, that irritates me because you don’t know what I have been through.’ And you are right. I don’t know what you have been through but I know what I have been through. And there have been times when I cried myself to sleep. There have been times when I have beaten my head against the wall. There have been times when I looked at God and said, ‘Surely you are not in this.’ And while He was not in that, in that this was sin that is in the earth, that was causing this pain, in this I knew I had an advocate before the Father who intercedes for me and that is the Holy Spirit who lives in me.

While I don’t always understand everything that is going on in my life at times I do get this - God will be glorified. And if my suffering is for the glorification of God then I am cool with it. It doesn’t mean I like it, doesn’t mean I want another dose, please, but in this moment if God will be glorified it is sufficient.

Finally, God doesn’t force hope on us, but He does provide it for us. He doesn’t force hope on us. You can go through life with a stinking attitude being angry and bitter. I keep finding things in our culture that just drive me crazy and now that I get to preach every once in a while I just have to address them. Sorry about that. But have you ever
seen these people who say, ‘Well, I just want to curse God.’ And it is okay to be angry with God, He understands. There is a theological term for that. It is hogwash!

How dare we get angry with God? How childish that is. I am saying we are supposed to suck it up and take it. He is our heavenly Father. He knows things we don’t know. Are we His or are we not? We may not have to like things but we are supposed to love Him. And for us to constantly question the goodness of God because things don’t go our way is being horribly immature. Who do we think we are to shake our fist in the face of a holy and righteous God who created us and then redeemed us? Who do we think we are?

Instead we need to remember that in our darkest, deepest night when our world is shattered and our life is falling apart and we have literally been dragged to our knees by circumstances in brokenness, God lives in us. And we can look at Him and like Job when his wife said to him, “Curse God and die,” we can respond like Job and say, “The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord.” We have hope, don’t be frustrated. We have hope, don’t feel abandoned. Those who are in Christ Jesus have hope.

As we conclude, let me ask you this. Maybe today there is something going on in your heart, maybe you are bitter, angry, hopeless or hurting, maybe when you heard me earlier tell you to suck it up you didn’t like that. I hope you understood that God loves you and He wants to remind you of that hope that lies within you. He doesn’t want to see you suffer, but He is not going to tell you a lie to relieve it. Right now maybe you need someone to pray with you. There will be someone right over here to pray with you. Maybe you just want to pray by yourself, you can come pray by these crosses. If you have any kind of need please do that. Ask God what He needed you to hear today and let it change your life. Let’s pray.

Father, thank you so much for your word. Thank you for the hope of Jesus Christ. Thank you for the promise that all this can mean something. Father, I pray that even now we have a hope that lies within us, that the Holy Spirit will guide us to a closer walk to you, and that we will be transformed as we yield to you, yield to truth and yield to your Holy Spirit. In Christ’s name I pray. Amen.