

## Day 16 — Tears in His Bottle

Psalms 56:8

Some suffering feels invisible.

There are tears people see publicly, and there are tears nobody else ever notices. Quiet grief carried after everyone leaves the funeral. Private anxiety hidden behind smiles at church. Long nights beside hospital beds. Disappointments too deep for words.

Many believers quietly wonder during painful seasons: Does God really see this?

David wrote these words while running for his life—hunted by enemies, sleeping in caves, unsure if he'd see morning. This suffering wasn't just private. It was unresolved for years. If anyone had reason to believe his pain went unrecorded, it was David.

And yet he answers that question with one of the most tender images in all of Scripture.

He writes:

"You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?"  
(Psalm 56:8)

David pictures God collecting every tear His people cry. Notice he speaks of a bottle and a book that carry vivid encouragements. The bottle says God treasures what you cry over. The book says something sturdier: it counts as evidence. It's on record. Your suffering isn't just observed—it's testified to. What the world overlooks, heaven enters into evidence.

David's comfort wasn't that the danger immediately disappeared. Instead, he discovered something even better: The God who numbered his tears was closer than the enemies who hunted him. Many Christians fear their suffering is meaningless because nobody fully understands it. Psalm 56 answers that fear directly: not one tear escapes God's attention, and not one of them goes unrecorded.

Jesus Himself was called "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." He wept at Lazarus's tomb. He understands suffering from the inside. The One who keeps count of our tears isn't a distant observer—He entered our suffering Himself.

Sometimes God removes suffering quickly. Other times He sustains believers through long seasons of weakness and grief. Glory is coming, but grief is often the road that leads there. And the God who promises future glory never abandons His people in present grief—Psalm 56 is proof that He never wastes it, either. He doesn't simply see our suffering; He uses it to prepare us for the glory to come.

The tears that fall unnoticed on earth are carefully counted in heaven.



Heaven doesn't merely promise that suffering will end. It promises that every sorrow God remembered will one day be redeemed. One day heaven will reveal just how near God was during every painful moment.

Revelation promises a coming day when:

"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (21:4).

Believers don't wipe away their own tears in the end—God himself does. The God who bottles our tears is the God who will one day wipe them away forever. Until that day, knowing that God remembers every tear gives believers courage to keep trusting Him through every sorrow. The tears Christians cry now are temporary. The comfort of Christ is eternal.

### Discussion Questions

1. What's a burden you're carrying that you assume no one—maybe even God—has fully registered?
2. What does the image of God collecting tears communicate about His character?
3. How does Jesus' own suffering comfort believers?
4. Why is it important to remember that God sees hidden pain?
5. How can Christians reflect God's compassion toward hurting people?

## Day 17 — When You Don't Know How to Pray

Romans 8:26-27

Some suffering leaves people speechless.

There are moments when believers want to pray but cannot find words. Grief feels too heavy. Anxiety clouds the mind. Exhaustion drains emotional strength. Sometimes Christians sit quietly before God with hearts full of pain but no clear language to express it.

The apostle Paul understands that weakness.

He writes:

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought.” (Romans 8:26)

Notice Paul includes himself—even mature believers sometimes struggle to pray. That truth alone should comfort anyone who assumes strong faith means always knowing exactly what to say to God. Paul says the opposite: weakness is normal, and God has already provided help for it.

The Holy Spirit intercedes for believers “with groanings too deep for words.” This does not mean Christians must produce mystical experiences or emotional displays. Paul’s point is that the Spirit faithfully carries the burdens believers cannot adequately express themselves.

Thomas Goodwin writes, “The Spirit prays in you, because Christ prays for you. He is an intercessor on earth, because Christ is an intercessor in heaven.”<sup>1</sup> Goodwin points us to the preaching of the Word and our prayers as evidences of the Holy Spirit that Christ’s heart towards sinners is still the same as it ever was. The Spirit comes in Christ’s name, in his stead, and works by Christ’s commission.

Believers never approach God alone. Even when prayers feel weak, distracted, confused, or broken, the Spirit intercedes perfectly according to the will of God.

Many Christians become discouraged because prayer sometimes feels dry or ineffective. They assume their weakness disqualifies them from approaching God. Romans 8 teaches the opposite: the Spirit helps believers precisely because they are weak.

Sometimes the holiest prayers are not eloquent speeches but simple cries for mercy:

- “Lord, help me.”
- “I don’t understand.”

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ* (Trigian, 2023), Kindle edition, 41.

- “Please sustain me.”

Every sincere cry reaches the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit and through the intercession of Christ.

One day believers will speak with perfect clarity in the presence of God. But until then, Christians possess divine help for every weak and trembling prayer.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Why can prayer feel difficult during suffering?
2. How does Romans 8 comfort weak believers?
3. What does it mean that the Spirit intercedes for Christians?
4. Why is weakness not a barrier to approaching God?
5. What's a prayer too heavy or confused for words that you need to bring to God this week?

## Day 18 — No Suffering Is Pointless

Romans 8:28

It's midnight. I'm sitting in the ER next to my wife as a large nurse holds my arm down so the PA can reattach the end of my finger. The combination of socks, a wood floor, and a steep set of stairs left me at the bottom wondering how I'd ended up at the bottom so quickly. In an instant, I wondered if anything was broken and what could be done with my finger. It all seemed so dumb. It hurt. And in that moment, it seemed entirely pointless. Why?

I didn't just need stitches and an X-ray in that moment. I needed Romans 8:28.

Romans 8:28 is one of the most beloved promises in Scripture—and one of the most misunderstood.

Paul writes:

*"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)*

Notice Paul does not say all things are good.

Cancer is not good. Betrayal is not good. Abuse is not good. Grief is not good. Death is not good. Christians should never pretend painful things are easy or pleasant.

But Paul does say God works through all things for the good of His people. As Joni Eareckson Tada wisely observed, "God permits what He hates to accomplish what He loves."<sup>1</sup> That does not make suffering good, **but it does mean suffering is never outside God's sovereign hands—and it is never random for believers.** Even when life feels chaotic and confusing, God remains sovereign over every detail.

John Piper often reminds Christians: *"God is always doing 10,000 things in your life, and you may be aware of three of them."*<sup>2</sup> It's our job to trust God with the other 9,997 things. Most of the time believers cannot see the larger story God is writing. You've likely heard God's providence compared to the underside of a tapestry. From below we see tangled knots and loose threads that appear to make no sense. But from above the Master Weaver is creating a beautiful design. Heaven is the day believers will finally see the other side.

Only the Holy Spirit can help a suffering Christian trust the Master Weaver when life feels tangled. In a sermon entitled "A Happy Christian," Charles Spurgeon said, "The worldling blesses God while he gives him plenty, but the Christian blesses him when he smites him: he

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<sup>1</sup> Joni Eareckson Tada, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/ten-words-that-changed-everything-about-my-suffering>.

<sup>2</sup> John Piper, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-is-always-doing-10000-things-in-your-life>.

believes him to be too wise to err and too good to be unkind; he trusts him where he cannot trace him, looks up to him in the darkest hour, and believes that all is well.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, when you can’t trace God’s hand, you can trust his heart.

Joseph understood this better than most. How could he understand why betrayal, slavery, and prison were part of God's plan? And how could Naomi dare to dream of redemption while standing in the middle of the death of her husband and both sons in a foreign land? Clearly the disciples could not comprehend why Jesus' crucifixion had to happen. But later God's purposes became clearer.

Romans 8:28 does not promise Christians immediate explanations. God doesn't promise that believers will understand every chapter of their story while they're living it. He promises that the Author never loses control of the plot.

Sometimes suffering deepens prayer. Sometimes it exposes idols. Sometimes it teaches dependence upon God. Sometimes it equips believers to comfort others. And sometimes Christians will not fully understand suffering until heaven—but eternity changes perspective. One day believers will finally see how God's wisdom, faithfulness, and sovereignty operated even through the darkest moments of life. The questions that remain unanswered on earth will one day give way to worship in heaven.

That does not remove pain now, but it does mean Christians never suffer meaninglessly. The cross itself proves this. God turned the greatest evil ever committed into the means of the greatest good He ever accomplished—the crucifixion of the Son of God became the means of the world's salvation.

If God could bring resurrection out of crucifixion, He can be trusted to bring purpose out of your present suffering—even when you cannot yet see it.

For believers, suffering is never ultimate. God's sovereign goodness is.

I still don't know why I ended up at the bottom of those stairs that night. But I know the God who let it happen hasn't lost the plot.

## Discussion Questions

1. What does Romans 8:28 actually promise believers?
2. Why is it important not to say suffering itself is “good”?
3. How does God often work through hardship and pain?
4. Why can Christians trust God even without full explanations?
5. How does the cross help believers trust God during suffering?

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Spurgeon, “A Happy Christian,” Sermon No. 736.

## Day 19 — Today and the Last Day

Romans 8:25

“By loving God and heavenly things we become good.”— Richard Sibbes, *A Glance of Heaven*, pp. 34–35.

Famed missionary Elisabeth Elliot knew what it meant to wait. Long before her husband, Jim, was martyred while taking the gospel to the Waorani people of Ecuador, God had already been teaching her through the long wait of their courtship. Reflecting on that season, she wrote:

"I realized that the deepest spiritual lessons are not learned by His letting us have our way in the end, but by His making us wait, bearing with us in love and patience until we are able honestly to pray what He taught His disciples to pray: *Thy will be done.*"

Did you catch that? Some of God's deepest work in our lives happens while we wait. Waiting isn't an obstacle to the Christian life; it's one of God's primary classrooms.

But waiting is hard.

Waiting for healing.  
Waiting for answers.  
Waiting for reconciliation.  
Waiting for Christ to return.

Christians live between two worlds.

There is the world believers experience today—a world filled with suffering, disappointment, temptation, sickness, anxiety, and death. And then there is the coming world Christ has promised—a world of resurrection, glory, righteousness, and eternal joy in the presence of God.

Paul describes Christians as people who: “wait for it with patience.” (Romans 8:25)

Believers are waiting for something infinitely greater than relief from today's troubles. They are waiting for the full redemption of all things.

One cancer patient described this present life as: “the basement, not the ceiling.” That image captures the Christian life beautifully. This present world is not the highest floor of existence. It is not ultimate reality. As painful as suffering can be, the best things are still ahead for those who belong to Christ.

Here's the remarkable reality: for believers, this broken world is the closest they will ever come to hell. But for those who reject Christ, it is the closest they will ever come to heaven. That doesn't minimize today's suffering. It magnifies tomorrow's glory.

Paul says Christians wait “with patience,” not because life is easy, but because Christ has already secured the future through His death and resurrection. Jesus himself waited. He

endured the cross “for the joy that was set before him” (Hebrews 12:2). Because Christ waited faithfully, believers can wait patiently. Biblical patience is not passive resignation. It is hopeful endurance.

Waiting isn’t an evil to be eradicated; it’s a discipline to be cultivated. Christians keep praying. Keep obeying. Keep loving. Keep serving. Keep persevering because they know their story ends in glory.

The world often treats earthly life as ultimate. That is why suffering can feel completely crushing to people without hope. The last day is glorious, but today is often grievous.

But heaven changes perspective.

Today is not the last day.

Today’s grief is not the end of the story.  
Today’s weakness is not your final condition.  
Today’s tears are not your eternal reality.  
Today’s waiting will one day give way to everlasting joy.

One day faith will become sight. Christ will return. Bodies will rise. Creation will be restored. And every suffering believer will finally discover that the glory awaiting them far surpasses the pain endured along the way.

The Christian life requires patience because glory has not fully arrived yet. But the day is coming when waiting will be over, faith will become sight, our hopes will become our haves, and every promise of God will be fulfilled.

Richard Sibbes wrote, “We should begin the life of heaven upon earth, as much as may be.”<sup>1</sup> Christians begin living for heaven today by fixing their hearts on Christ, treasuring heavenly things above earthly things and faithfully following Him until faith becomes sight.

## Discussion Questions

1. Why is waiting so difficult for human beings?
2. What does biblical patience look like during suffering?
3. How does heaven reshape the way Christians endure hardship?
4. Why is it important to remember that “today is not the last day”?
5. What future promises most strengthen your perseverance right now?

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Sibbes, *A Glance of Heaven*, 26.

## Day 20 — The Spirit's Down Payment

Romans 8:23-25

Christians live with a strange tension. The friction between the already of today and the not yet of Heaven sounds like a groan. Creation groans. Humanity groans. And Christians groan—not because they have no hope, but because they know the best is still to come.

Not all groaning is bad. Some groaning is holy.

In C.S. Lewis' *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Reepicheep the mouse is captivated by a mysterious country beyond the eastern sea. Reepicheep explains, "I do not know what it means. But the spell of it has been on me all my life."<sup>1</sup> Later as the ship sails farther east than anyone has ever gone, he declares: "While I can, I sail east in the Dawn Treader. When she fails me, I paddle east in my coracle. When she sinks, I shall swim east with my four paws."<sup>2</sup>

What drives him? Homesickness—for a country he's never seen but was somehow always seeking. Christians carry that same ache, except ours has a name and an object.

As theologian Donald Bloesch puts it, "Our greatest affliction is not anxiety, or even guilt, but rather homesickness—a nostalgia or ineradicable yearning to be at home with God."<sup>3</sup> That's one unique reason Christians groan. We groan for the future. We groan for heaven. We've tasted enough of Christ to know this world can never fully satisfy us.

Believers already belong to Christ, yet they still wait for the fullness of redemption. Christians already possess forgiveness, adoption, and the Holy Spirit, yet they still battle weakness, temptation, suffering, and death.

Describing Christians, Paul writes:

*"...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."*

The firstfruits were the beginning of the harvest—the early evidence that more was certainly coming. Paul says the Holy Spirit functions like that for Christians. The Spirit is God's guarantee that future glory will fully arrive. He gives believers enough of heaven to make them long for the rest of it.

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (New York: HarperCollins, 1952), 20.

<sup>2</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (New York: HarperCollins, 1952), 156. A "coracle" is a lifeboat.

<sup>3</sup> Donald Bloesch, quoted in Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2004), 176.

Believers already experience foretastes of heaven now through the Spirit's presence. Christians taste conviction of sin, assurance of salvation, joy in worship, love for God's people, hunger for holiness, and growing affection for Christ.

Every one of those experiences is a preview of eternity. Every earthly joy whispers that something infinitely greater is still to come. Every work of the Spirit reminds believers they were made for another world.

Puritan Thomas Goodwin flips the picture around. While the Spirit awakens our desire to be with Christ, Christ is homesick for us too. Goodwin imagines Christ in heaven saying to his people on earth: "Heaven shall not hold me, nor my Father's company, if I have not you with me, my heart is so set upon you."<sup>4</sup>

What a remarkable thought. We are exiles longing to be home with Christ, but Christ longs for His people even more.

The Spirit awakens homesickness for heaven. That is why earthly success still leaves believers unsatisfied. Even life's happiest moments remind Christians they were made for something greater. The Spirit continually whispers to their hearts, "This world is not your home."

At the same time, the Spirit provides assurance.

Believers often fear:

- Will I endure?
- Will God keep me?
- Will I finally reach glory?

Romans 8 reminds Christians that the God who began their salvation will certainly complete it. The presence of the Spirit is evidence believers truly belong to Christ.

The Spirit not only awakens longing for heaven, but also strengthens believers while they wait. He comforts weary saints, convicts wandering hearts, empowers obedience, and sustains faith during suffering.

One day the partial experience believers enjoy now will give way to fullness. The firstfruits will become the full harvest, and every longing the Spirit awakened will finally be satisfied. And every believer will finally be home forever with Christ—sailing, at last, into the utter East.

## Discussion Questions

1. What does Paul mean by the "firstfruits of the Spirit"?
2. How does the Holy Spirit awaken longing for heaven?
3. Why do earthly successes still leave people unsatisfied?

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven towards Sinners on Earth*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1863), 95.

4. How does the Spirit strengthen believers during suffering and waiting?
5. How does the Spirit's presence assure Christians that future glory is certain?
6. Where in your own life do you notice this "holy homesickness"—a satisfaction that never quite lasts, no matter how good the thing is?