Too Deep for Words
Romans 8:26, “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.”

Can you sense it? Can you hear it in Paul’s words? There’s a yearning. There’s a longing that simply oozes from the page. Whenever I read the passage I get this feeling that Paul must have been frustrated out of his mind as he wrote it. I can just picture him, head in hands, rocking back and forth as he scoured his brains for the right words. I can imagine him trying first one word and then another and then smacking his forehead because of his own limitations.

We’ve all had moments like that. We’ve all had that maddening experience of trying to describe something that simply defies description! Have you ever tried to describe your wedding day? How about your honeymoon? How about the loss of spouse? How about the birth of your first child? It’s when you try to describe moments like these that you come to realize that some things are simply too deep for words. If you’ve ever tried to describe moments like these, then you’ll have had a small taste of the exasperation Paul experienced as he wrote this passage of Romans 8.

Paul doesn’t usually struggle to find the right words. He’s one of the most skilled authors in the Bible. But even he knows his limits. The New Creation is simply beyond description. The beauty of it, the glory of it is something too deep for words! But that’s not the only thing that puts it out
of Paul’s reach. No, there’s something else about it that makes it impossible
to describe.

The New Creation is an elusive thing. Paul can never get a clear look
at it. It’s kind of like a floater in his eye. He can see its outline. He can see
an overall shape. But it always evades a head-on glance. It’s always on the
periphery of his vision. He knows it’s there. And occasionally he can catch a
sideways glimpse of it. He can see it, and yet he can’t quite see it. So, he
goes about it the only way he knows how – by talking about what it’s not.

Paul can’t see it clearly. He can’t give a precise description of it. Not
even close! But he sees enough to know without a doubt that the New
Creation isn’t like this world. It isn’t like what we see. It isn’t what we know.
The difference between them is like the difference between a candle and the
sun itself! Paul gets that sidelong glance of the New Creation and knows
immediately that this world is not what it should be. Because of Adam’s sin
and ours, this world is a faded, broken, groaning wreck of what it once was.

And you know it! Deep down in your guts, deep down in your soul you
sense that things aren’t right! Natural disasters, plagues, disease, and death
infest this world. True enough, it has moments of splendor. It has moments
of profound beauty. But the beauty is always marred by destruction. It’s
glory is always dulled by death. Consider this – our bodies are fearfully and
wonderfully made! But they aren’t what they ought to be. They suffer from
aches and pains. Viruses and infections lay them low. They slow down, they
wear out, and eventually they die. In this broken world, even our bodies are
faded, broken, groaning wrecks of what God intended them to be.

But it’s not just in our bodies. No the crack begun in Eden has
splintered even into our relationships. You can’t quite see what they ought to
look like. You see the outline. You get that sidelong glimpse of what it looks
like to be a true parent, a true child, a true sibling, a true friend. But what
we experience isn’t that. Selfishness, laziness, jealousy, anger, self-
centeredness infest every relationship you have. Not one of them is free
from the brokenness of sin. In this broken world, even your closest
relationships are faded, broken, groaning wrecks of what God intended them
to be.

And that’s not even the worst of it. No, there’s a place you see it even
more clearly still. In your relationship with God. You long, you yearn for a
right relationship with Him. You’ve seen glimpses of it. You know the outline
of what a perfect relationship with Him would look like – no guilt, no regret,
no shame, no sin. Can you imagine that?! Have you longed for that? Have
you yearned for that?! The sad truth of it is that even for us Christians, even
for you who know that you are forgiven, your relationship with God is but a
shadow of what He intended and of what you crave!

So you groan. We know things aren’t right. Our sin has messed
everything up. Our relationship to God, our relationships with each other,
even our relationship with creation pales in comparison with the New
Creation that always hovers on the periphery of our vision. Oh, it’s an *elusive* thing! You can’t quite see it. And yet it creates in you a longing nostalgia! It stirs a yearning for an existence whose echoes you can hear, and yet cannot quite hear. It stirs in you a yearning for a homeland you never knew, but that is more home to you than this broken world will ever be.

And that yearning can be a painful thing. It’s so much easier to drown out those distant echoes. So you settle for this world. You teach yourself to make do in Egypt. And you try to tell yourself that the Promised Land, that thing on the periphery of your vision isn’t just elusive, it’s illusory, nothing more than a trick of your inner being. You give up the hope of that soul-deep longing. You accept the fact that this *broken* creation is it. *This* is reality!

There’s no such thing as marriage like the Bible describes it. There’s no self-sacrificial love. Divorce just happens. There *is* no New Creation. There’s no such thing as a sexually pure person. Sex before marriage and pornography, that’s just the way things are. There is no New Creation. Sickness, disease, death, that’s just part of real life. That’s the real world. There is no New Creation. Broken relationships, guilt, and shame, that’s just the way things are. There’s no New Creation. Egypt is the real world.

But it’s not! You know it isn’t. God has instilled that yearning for the Promised Land in your heart. That unfulfilled, that persistent, that nagging
and painful memory of lost union with God and all creation remains! And so you groan.

So what does Paul say to all of this? Paul says, “Good! Yearn. Groan!” Paul doesn’t tell you to push aside that longing. He doesn’t tell you to stifle it or ignore it or suck it up. He doesn’t tell you to deal with this broken life the way it is. No, Paul says, “Good! The Holy Spirit is the One who’s making you groan! The Spirit is the One who makes you yearn! So long for it! Pray for the New Creation!” And when you don’t even know what to pray, when you can’t see what you desire clearly enough to express it on paper or in prayer, the Spirit Himself intercedes for you with groanings His own! Groanings that are too deep for words.

Can you believe that? God not only encourages you to groan, but He helps you to do it on top of that! But this is no ordinary groaning. This isn’t the grumbling of Israel in the wilderness, wishing they’d stayed in Egypt. No, this is the groaning of those in the wilderness, heading toward the Promised Land and asking over and over again, “Are we there yet?!” This is not a yearning and longing condemned to be unsatisfied. This is a groaning with the destination in view! This is a groaning infused with hope!

You see, the New Creation hasn’t always been so elusive. It hasn’t always been like that floater, just on the periphery of our vision. No, there was one day, one special day, when God placed it right in front of the Apostles’ eyes. It was on a Sunday morning. And woman named Mary wept
at a newly sealed tomb in a garden. This death was too much for her to take. It confirmed to her once and for all that those yearnings in her heart were simply figments of her imagination. It confirmed to her once and for all that this is all there is. There is no New Creation and Egypt is the real world.

And then through her groaning she heard a voice calling her name, “Mary!” And then through her tears, she saw a familiar face. She knew that face! Deep in her soul, she knew that face! This wasn’t just the man she had called rabbi! This wasn’t just the man she’d seen die on the cross. This was the one for whom her heart had yearned! This face was that elusive shape hovering on the periphery of her vision! And now she saw it head-on. “Mary! Mary!” This voice was the source of the echo in her soul. Only now could she hear it with stunning clarity.

You see, it was in the resurrected body of Jesus Christ that Mary and the disciples saw clearly the beginning of the New Creation. It was on Easter morning that they finally knew for certain that the New Creation wasn’t just a dream! It wasn’t just an illusion! The echoes in their soul were real! And here at last they heard and saw it firsthand – the source and the hope of their groaning. As Paul wrote, “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. But, in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

So what do we do? What should you do in this faded, broken, groaning wreck of a world? Keep groaning! Keep yearning! Don’t settle for Egypt.
Don’t buy into the lie that this is all there is, this is the best we can hope for. Don’t buy into that hopeless philosophy that life is about the journey and not about the destination. Don’t settle for the philosophy of despair that says the journey itself is satisfactory. It’s not! You know it’s not! That sideways glimpse may be elusive, but it’s not an illusion. That echo may be indistinct, but it’s real! And we know it’s real because Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead. So keep longing. Keep yearning. Keep groaning. Keep praying! Keep hoping! Because Jesus says, “Surely, I am coming soon.” “Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! Come quickly.”