

Romans 8:26-30, "The Purposes of God"

Introduction

What kind of love do people who are suffering need? Perhaps you recently heard news about some suicides. This September, the famous actress Yuko Takeuchi, who won many awards many times, was found hanged at the age of 40. Two weeks before that, the actress Sei Ashina was found dead by her own hand. In July, it was the popular actor Haruma Miura, and before that it was Hana Kimura, who appeared in Terrace House. She was bullied by social media and committed suicide.

For many, the first 10 years of working in Tokyo are difficult. Many Christians, after graduating from college, become disappointed and depressed in their jobs. They usually do not know any other Christians in their workplace, no one to encourage them. What kind of love do you need for people who are suffering?

Today, we will look at three points:

1. The Help of Prayer
2. The Hard Work of Growth
3. The Greatness of Hope

The Apostle Paul, a talented Jewish scholar, when he met the resurrected Christ, wrote a letter to the Christians in Rome in Corinth, Greece in 57 AD. Today, we will look at part of this letter.

1. The Help of Prayer

"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans." (v. 26)

Even though people are saved, the world is suffering and groaning. But prayer offers a spiritual groan in response. Though we are weak and often do not know how to pray, through the wordless groaning of the Spirit, we can pray and the Spirit intercedes for us.

"And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God." (v. 27)

God the Father listens to our prayers and explores our hearts. He knows the thoughts of the Spirit. Since the Spirit prays and intercedes for Christians to God the Father, God also listens to the prayers of the Spirit. In this way, the Spirit specifically helps us.

Like the Christians in Rome in the first century, we may feel loneliness and despair when we are suffering. We may feel that God is not watching over us. We may feel that nothing is going right and there is no path forward. We may not know how to pray. But the Spirit of God is groaning and praying for us. We are not alone. The Spirit is with us, fighting for us, interceding and praying to God the Father for us. This is a concrete help from the Spirit.

About 10 years ago, on December 8, 2010, my wife Antonia and I came to Japan to work with Grace City Church. We arrived at Narita Airport and stayed in a small hotel room about 3m by 2m. We didn't have an apartment. We couldn't speak Japanese. We didn't know much about Tokyo life or culture. Even when I looked at a map of Tokyo, I couldn't understand it. When I went to a convenience store or supermarket, the only food I could read was Snickers. When speaking with a real estate agent, I needed an interpreter. It was scary to leave the England we knew and come to a new country.

However, we were comforted by Pastor Fukuda and the people at Grace City Church. Even if we didn't know anything, we knew that the people at Grace City would help us. In the same way, we Christians are not alone. The Holy Spirit is with us, and we can rest assured that the Holy Spirit will help when we don't know what to do.

In fact, Jesus Christ himself took time to prayer to remember these things. Especially during difficult times, Jesus went alone to pray to God the Father and experience fellowship through the Holy Spirit. Christians do not get help from the Spirit because of their good deeds, but because Jesus Christ represents us and gives us the help of the Spirit.

Last Wednesday, I participated in a prayer walk around Marunouchi. The meeting has led by women working in the Shinmaru Building. We gathered at Hibiya Park at 8 a.m., walked to the Imperial Palace park, listened to the Psalms, and briefly shared. When I hear the struggles of other Christians, I remember that the Spirit was groaning

and praying with them. Christians are not alone. Prayer helps wherever and whenever we are.

2. The Hard Work of Growth

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (v. 28)

Christians receive God's love with the help of prayer. In verse 28, Paul writes that God works everything together for good.

“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.” (v. 29)

The good God works toward is shaping us into being like the Son of God. God the Father works to make us Christians look like Jesus Christ through all things.

Christians in Rome in the first century faced divisions and conflict of many kinds. The percentage of Christians was lower than even in Japan today. Despite this, in all our weakness, suffering, and conflict, God the Father works to make us more like Jesus Christ.

There was a man who believed in God. He was born into a large family, one of twelve sons. He was the eleventh, and his dad loved him better than the others causing much jealousy. He was sold as a slave by his brothers without his father knowing, and sent to a foreign land.

One day, he was accused of trying to attack the wife of his master. Even though he denied it, he was thrown in jail...for 10 years! Ten years later, he was finally released and became a high-ranking civil servant in the foreign country and then prime minister. When a great famine came, he was able to help not only that country but the surrounding countries as well, and eventually his own family who betrayed him.

This story is about Joseph in the first book of the Bible. Joseph said to his brothers, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” (Genesis 50:20)

Even though it is hard to believe in the middle of suffering, God works through difficulty. From the story of Joseph, you can see that God always works for the benefit of Christians even through difficult things.

Jesus Christ was innocent, close to God the Father, and like us wanted to avoid suffering, but he was persecuted, betrayed, and executed on the cross. He received God's wrath and punishment for our weaknesses, lack of trust, and betrayal. When he was crucified, it seemed meaningless but through the suffering gave forgiveness. If God works through the greatest suffering, can't we trust that God works through our smaller suffering?

God did not promise to protect Christians from suffering but to work for good through the suffering, to reshape the Christian to be more like Jesus. Through hardship, illness, death, broken relationships, lack of sleep, and sin, let's rejoice that God works every second of every day to make us more like Jesus.

3. The Greatness of Hope

“And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.” (Romans 8:30)

This describes the steps of the Christians in Rome in the first century. First, God predestined them with his love. Then, they heard the gospel and became Christians. By doing so, God recognized the people's righteousness and forgave them. The final step was to glorify them. Christians are glorified on Judgment Day because they are justified in the previous stage.

This was still in the future for Christians in Rome in the first century. We are still in a situation of suffering and weakness, so we have not yet reached the glory that God promised, the perfect world, and the perfection of Jesus. However, since God has already recognized the Christians as righteousness, he will definitely give us glory, so we have the highest hope.

Things were hard for the Christians of the first century Rome, but one day Jesus Christ will come again, judge, destroy all bad things, and completely restore and reshape this world. There is hope in the new heavens and earth. Today, there is still conflict,

suffering, and weakness. Jesus will come again to perfect the world and to completely reshape Christians like him and make them innocent.

My wife's friend is pregnant right now. The due date is next month. Now is a pretty difficult time. Her body is heavy. It is difficult to walk. She wakes up many times in the night. Occasionally, the baby kicks her. However, at the same time that it is difficult, there is also great hope. A baby will be born. The same is true for Christians. We are in the process. It's painful now, but when God grows Christians through this process and Jesus comes back to this world, Christians will be perfected and glorified. This is the greatest hope. This is a that we need.

Recently, I read an article written by Tomisawa, Ayaito Katanuma, and Marika:

"The number of suicides in Japan is increasing, especially among women and children. This is the way of life during the spread of COVID-19. We can see how the stress affects the mental health. Sociologists have long warned that the economic and social collapse of coronavirus infection prevention measures can lead to more deaths than the coronavirus itself. Suicide is the leading cause of death for minors. The number of suicides this year has risen to 13,000, and the death toll from the coronavirus is less than 2,000. According to government statistics, the number of suicides in August increased by 15.4% to 1854. ... According to statistics from the Police Agency, the number of suicides in October was 2,153, an increase of 300 from the previous month, the highest number of suicides per month since May 2015."

Thanks to the cross of Jesus Christ, the suffering and despair of today's society is not the end. This world was originally created by God as a good thing. Because of our sinfulness, our rebellious attitudes and actions against the Creator, we have become corrupt and broken. Yet the Creator himself, Jesus Christ, entered the world he created 2,000 years ago and was sentenced to death, receiving the punishment we deserved. He died and was resurrected and is now reigning as king of the world. The world is heading for the highest hope as each person hears about Jesus, is forgiven, and is transformed into something similar to Jesus.

Most people in Japan have not heard of this highest hope, the hope of glory. Let's share this hope with our colleagues, friends, and relatives in the middle of the coronavirus epidemic. We need the help of prayer and the sacrifice of Jesus to know

this hope. Let's include the best of hope in our conversations this week.

Conclusion:

When we are suffering, what kind of love do we need?

1. The Help of Prayer
2. The Hard Work of Growth
3. The Greatness of Hope

Amen.