



Broken: Good News for Tough Times Spirit-Fed, Spirit-Led

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Romans 8:12-17
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Introduction to the Scripture

Romans Chapter 8 is one of my favorites in all scripture. It is about a new life that each of us can have IF we choose to be led by the Spirit.

e.g. Intimately connected with God.

Paul reminds us that everyday life challenges us to make choices:

To live by the flesh (Britt): self- focused,

Or, to live by the Spirit: a God- focused life.

(Another choice): To live a life of death: not being the person God intends us to be,

Or, to choose life: being the person God intends.

Of course, as Jesus followers, we want and think we choose to live by the spirit and to choose being the person God wants to be, but sometimes our lives just don't play out that way.

Sometimes our lives get cracked and even broken: As symbolized by the piece of pottery in front of us. Today is the second in a series on Romans 8: "Good News for Tough Times" by Jacqueline J. Lewis. Paul is saying: if we choose a life intimately connect with God and guided by the spirit, we live in hope knowing (as we will hear next week) that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Our Christian life, like it or not, is a walk of brokenness but if we are led by the Spirit of God the pieces can be put together.

Let's listen in to what Paul is attempting to teach us.

Message: Spirit-Fed, Spirit-Led

1. Our daughter-in-law, Lane, who I love very much, delivered a healthy baby boy on June 12. His name is Breck. Cute as can be, but between you and me, when it comes to health issues, Lane is a bit of a drama queen. The day after Breck's birth Susie and I expectantly drove to MKE to see our new grandson. Craig met us and showed us the way to the birth floor. It was near a shift change. Craig, the proud father, identified himself and said, "We had our baby." Response: "We know." "How do you know?" "We heard her screams." Now, to Lane's credit, she chose to receive no anesthesia. She, her doula, and the doctor brought forth new life.

But for that to happen she had to go through labor pains.

OK, I know what you moms are thinking. "He's a guy; what does he know about labor pains."

Fair enough; I haven't even passed a kidney stone, which might be as close to labor pains a man can have. We all need to remember that labor pain is not fruitless pain. It is pain with a purpose.

2. But Paul, another guy, uses the metaphor of labor pains as he describes what the whole world (creation) is experiencing with the news of the gospel of Jesus (his life, death, and resurrection) being born into the world. In order for God's new life to be born through Jesus, the world will go through pain – like labor pain. Paul says: “creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God.” The world then, and the world now, is broken and fragmented.

Paul encourages us to look at the world, look at the state in which we live, look at the pain lingering within this family of faith, look at the condition of our own lives; none of us is immune to these pains of life.

We need new life! Something has to be born, come to life. Where do we go to put the pieces together?

3. Paul describes our human condition: “We are like orphans awaiting adoption.”

A few years ago, I had the privilege of being part of a surgical medical mission trip to Guatemala. We started with a tour of the medical complex that ended at a ward at the opposite end of the surgical area. It was a nursery, attended by Catholic sisters, who lived in an adjacent building. The nursery was crowded with abandoned babies and toddlers. I was heartbroken.

Who would abandon their child? Holding one those babies, I didn't even know her name, was one of the most helpless feelings in my life. The Guatemalan government had recently closed its doors to adoption, because thieves were abducting babies and selling them for adoption. Imagine the pain of an orphan, hoping someone could pick you up and take you home to be loved. I spent many of my non-chaplain surgery time with those beautiful little children, heartbroken and praying for their adoption.

4. Where is the pain in your life? We all have some place of pain: physical, emotional, spiritual and relational. My observation is that many here – perhaps you – are suffering some pain, too – Some experiencing the death of someone special to you in this past year; Some feeling the pain of the loss of a spiritual leader of this family of faith: perhaps John or Marylen or ? Some of you are feeling the pain of broken relationships challenges in your workplace.

No one is exempt from pain.

Susie and I enjoyed last weekend in Northern Wisconsin with some dear friends. Jim, my friend and I were golfing and talking about the state of our lives. Jim recently retired from World Neighbors – living out his passion for the economic development of third world countries. About to tee it up when Jim said, “I've lost my purpose.” He was suffering.

5. It's in the midst of these groanings that Paul reminds us that God will not leave us in a state of eternal grieving and labor pains. God will see us through, but we need to do some personal work, too. To put the pieces together, we need to get centered and stay centered with God. To do that we need to be led and nurtured by the spirit of God.

6. I recently read an article: Christian author: Joseph Mattera identifies "Seven Signs You are Missing God's Will (purpose) for your life:

1. Continued frustration with life
2. You feel burned out
3. You lack fruit ... not producing for God
4. Your life is off track ... mission adrift
5. Not focused ... scattered... spend too much time on 'minor things'
6. Little time to invest in your significant, key relationships
7. You are doing good, but not what you might do best

A couple of these hit me hard: too many minor things; not enough major things. One reason I am here, though this is a bit more major than I expected, and I find myself too often living in a state of frustration. (I don't mean IL, which IS a state of frustration!)

How about you? Easy to get distracted from being centered in God and being a Jesus follower!

7. Paul reminds us that the "Christian life IS life in the Spirit. This is not some ethereal thing. It is a gut feeling that God is directing the GPS of our lives. I want that GPS; how about you?

So, how do we become "spirit-fed and spirit-led"?

Paul gives us some clues: First, to know, believe and trust that God wants to adopt us – to move us from living for ourselves (flesh/sin) to living with God as our Abba, father/parent. God has a spirit-led, spirit-fed plan for each of us. And second, life in the spirit is characterized as a life of hope. Paul says it this way: *"For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."*

8. If you feel ... (above)... and I am guessing, we each find ourselves a bit estranged and orphaned in one of these areas of life, then we turn to God ... in a patient hope... trusting in faith... as we will hear next week... that nothing can separate us from God's adoption of us as a child of God. In hope and faith we are spirit fed, spirit led and yes, the broken pieces can come together. This IS good news for tough times!