

# Longing For Release

Romans 8:18-25

*Pastor Zeke B Pipher*

(GA) You know me; I'm always looking for metaphors. Well, I read a story this past week that made me think that William Perry's mouth could be a metaphor for life. I realize that his one might need a little bit of explaining...

A. You remember William Perry? "Refrigerator Perry?" He was that enormous – 6'2", 382 lb. – lineman for the Chicago Bears back when they won the Super Bowl in 1985.

1. 1985 was a good year for me as a 14-year-old – The Royals won the World Series, and the Bears won the Super Bowl.

a. Refrigerator Perry was one of my favorite players, because of how massive he was.

B. Well, even though the Fridge was this giant, strong man – he bench-pressed 465 lbs. – he was afraid to go to the dentist. The idea horrified Perry. So for twenty years, he never set foot in a dentist office.

1. This is where William Perry's mouth begins to remind me of life. You see, for decades, Perry's mouth caused him consistent suffering and pain.

a. Sure, during the first 45 years of William Perry's life he'd have a good stretch here or there, times when things didn't hurt for a week or two... maybe even a month...

i. But, eventually, soon enough, his mouth would creep back up and inflict some new pain. Sometimes the pain would get so bad, in fact, Perry would want to call it quits... for a particular tooth. He'd go to the workbench, grab pliers, and just yank it out.

a) The Fridge lost half his teeth by the time he was 45, many of which he pulled out himself trying to relieve the pain.

b) Which didn't always help... his gum infections were what really ached.

2. Perry's mouth was an consistent source of discomfort, loss, and suffering for him.

a. Kind of like life, right?

C. Do you ever feel like life is that for you? A consistent source of discomfort, loss, and suffering?

1. Sure, life gives us brief periods of relief & rest – we call these the "good times."

a. And some of you are in one of these "good times" right now. That's great.

2. But those "good times" are always broken up eventually by life. Give life a bit of time, and it'll creep back up and inflict some kind of pain. It's this way for everyone – even Christians. This is one of the problems that the health, wealth, and prosperity gospel people butt up against – Christians, like everyone...

a. Get old...

b. Sick...

c. Wrinkly...

d. Our stock portfolios drop... we lose our jobs, sometimes...

e. We develop allergies, or heart-problems, or get in car accidents...

f. We experience stress, or a lack of peace, in our relationships, at times...

- g. We lose our loved ones, normally way too early for our liking...
- 2. Life puts all people through all these things, even Christians. On top of this, Christians around the globe also suffer pain, **precisely because** they're Christians. This is called "persecution."
  - a. According to the World Evangelical Alliance, over 200 million Christians in over 60 countries were denied fundamental human rights this year **because of** their Christian faith.
    - i. Mothers denied healthcare for their newborns because of their public profession of Christ...
    - ii. Entire families refused food or fuel or legal status by their village because of their faith in Christ.
    - iii. In the Kandhamal district of India, 50 of the 82 villages have been destroyed by fire since September. Homes... businesses... hospitals...
      - i. Radical Hindu groups are trying to rid the area of Christians... so they've been lighting fires for three full months.
  - b. **Life** for many of our Christian siblings around the world is painful.
  - c. **And so is death.** In the "Missiometrics 2008" report – an annual report included in the International Bulletin of Missionary Research - they estimated that about 175,000 Christians were killed between mid-2007 to mid-2008... because of their faith.
    - i. The report states that this is an increase of 1.2 % over the previous year. And they estimate that by 2025, an average of 210,000 Christians will be martyred annually.

D. Sickness, stress, persecution, martyrdom... this is a hard life, isn't it? There's days that, I bet if given a choice, you'd rather be a tooth in William Perry's mouth than a journeyman in this life.

1. Perhaps this is why Solomon, the wisest of men, said, "Better is the day of death than the day of birth."

- a. Solomon knew what it meant to be born into this life.
  - i. I often think of babies, and how they come into life kicking and screaming... crying... cold... confused... and I often think, what an appropriate way to greet this life.

(SN) Do you ever wonder why God, the perfect embodiment of love & complete power, or sovereignty, leaves us here in the hospital? Do you ever wonder why God leaves us in this life of pain? Why He doesn't come fix it right now... or, pull us out?

A. We've raised this question a few times during our Hospital series. And I think it's a fair question to ask by people who love Jesus, but are in pain.

1. It's a fair question to ask, as long as we remain open to God's answer.

B. Why doesn't God just pull us out of this life of pain? We find a part of the answer in Romans 8:18-25.

(S) Turn with me to Romans 8. *Listen as I read 8:18-25.*

A. The first thing about this passage that strikes me is the powerful image of creation longing... or groaning:

- 1. (passages)
  - a. *Verse 19* says: "For the creation waits with eager longing"
    - i. The image is of someone straining his neck to see someone coming.
  - b. *Verse 22* says: "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together..."

- i. The image is of someone needing release from so much discomfort, they can help but groan.
  - 2. Why? Why does creation strain its neck? Why does creation groan?
  - 3. For the reasons we just went through together – creation longs and groans because the way that life, as God created it in Genesis 1... is not as God created it. It's painful... it's hard...
    - a. And we know this, and live with this realization. We also live with, as Solomon writes, "eternity in our hearts." This means that, even while we're sinners – and our sin's contribute to the gunkiness of life – we know there's a better way, a perfect way creation could be, and we long for things to be set right.
      - i. The rocks, the trees, the deer scattered along the Platte River, they all join us humans in groaning for the freedom that will come someday.
- B. Why not today? Again, though, why doesn't God rescue us from this life of futility now? This is where our passage gets really interesting.
  - 1. According to *verse 20*, God's not only, not saving us out of this frustration and pain, He's purposely subjecting us to it – "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it..."
    - a. This word "futility" is probably best translated: "frustration" or "absurdity."
      - i. It is rich with Genesis 3 connotations. This subjection of frustration began back in the Garden of Eden when God promised, or cursed, frustration upon this life as a punishment for sins.
        - i) Man would wrestle with the earth... the woman would have tremendous pain in childbirth... there would be strife between created beings. This was God's active subjection of creation to futility.
      - b. And God still actively subjects creation – you, me, the rocks & trees & deer along the Platte – to futility, or absurdity.
    - 2. Why? (Sometimes I feel like a three year old, walking around the house on the heels of his father, asking "why?" in response to everything. I'm ok with that... I still think it's good to ask "why?")
      - a. Why, if God is loving and only does what He does to us for our good... why subject us to futility, or frustration?
      - b. God gives us the answer at the very end of *verse 21*, "...in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God."
        - i. What is God saying here? He's saying, He subjects us to futility for the purpose of "hope."
          - a) The hope, it says, in *verse 22*, that we'll be set free someday from it all.
      - 3. This means that God subjects life upon us, so that we'll hope in being released someday.
        - a. And that, when we are released, we'll have a deeper sense of freedom from our bondage to decay, or life.
    - C. Our groaning *today*, produces our experience of glory *tomorrow*. Meaning, to get to the *pleasure* of release... it is necessary to go through the *pain* of bondage.
      - 1. These are deep, deep, waters – What is being taught here is that for us to get to the experience of joy in eternity – the joys of being liberated from pain and slavery to decay – we must first be subjected to pain and decay.

- a. Pain and pleasure necessarily go together. Current pain intensifies future pleasure. Which makes the pain brought to us by God, a good gift.
  - 2. We don't think like this today... it's hard to find Christian thinkers who write on pain like this today in the West. We're born with the expectation, the entitlement, of a pain-free life chalked full of pleasure.
    - a. I'm entitled to pain-free living... and as much pleasure as possible. But pain-free living produces no deep, substantive pleasure.
      - i. We often have to go back in time to find deep thinking on pain... and how it intensifies pleasure.
  - 2. Listen to how Augustine, the 4<sup>th</sup>-century Christian theologian, writes about the necessity of pain, in experiencing pleasure:
    - a. "The victorious general holds his triumph: yet unless he had fought, he would never have won the victory, and the greater was the danger in battle, the greater is the joy in triumph. The storm tosses seafarers about, and threatens them with shipwreck: they all grow pale at their coming death. Then the sky and the sea become calm and they exult exceedingly, just as they had feared exceedingly. A dear friend is ill, and his pulse tells us of his bad case. All those who long to see him in good health are in mind sick along with him. He gets well again, and although he does not yet walk with his former vigor, there is joy such as did not obtain before when he walked well and strong."
      - i. Then Augustine writes this, which is straight from Romans 8, "Everywhere a greater joy is preceded by a greater suffering."
        - a) Pleasure is necessarily preceded by pain...
  - 3. Leonardo da Vinci, about a thousand years after Augustine, also understood this. He scribbled a picture into his journal and called it "Pleasure and Pain." I'd put it up, but it's a graphic sketch. It's a picture of a man, a single male body from the waste below – naked, in typical da Vinci style. But about the level of the belly button, the man splits in two – two torsos, to sets of arms, two heads with two beards. It's like a Siamese twin, joined at the waist.
    - a. One twin is pleasure... the other is pain... Listen to what da Vinci, himself, comments about this painting:
      - i. "Pleasure and Pain are represented as twins, as though they were joined together, for there is never the one without the other... They are made with their backs turned to each other because they are contrary to one another. They are made growing out of the same trunk because they have one and the same foundation, for the foundation of pleasure is labor with pain, and the foundations of pain are vain and lascivious pleasures."
  - 4. Leonardo da Vinci put his hand on the pulse of Paul in Romans 8. Pain and joy are intertwined so deeply, that for some reason, for us as people to get to a true experience of pleasure... we must experience the pain God subjects us to.
    - a. Living in pain causes us to die with an insatiable appetite for pleasure.
      - i. Alexander Pope said, "You purchase pain with all that joy can give, and die of nothing but a rage to live."
    - b. Pain will take all your pleasure and joy, at times during this life... and what that does to us is makes us die with an intensified desire to live w/ pleasure and joy!
      - i. And this you will do if you are in Christ. Your finite pains on this earth will produce eternal, everlasting pleasures in the next life.
- D. So, why does God keep us here, in this painful and frustrating life?

1. So that we would hope – long for the day we escape.
  - a. And in that day, experience what CS Lewis called “The Weight of Glory” – or the “Heaviness of Glory.”
2. God knows us better than we know ourselves – He knows that as His children – who live in sin and chose sin for themselves – and as we experience the curse He’s inflicted – the pain – we’re being prepared for Him to bring us true pleasure.
  - a. He knows that this is how we are as humans. When the pain is gone, the pleasure is so good.

(VR) At age 45, beaten down by his mouth, William Perry went to the dentist. Oh, man... things were bad.

A. The dentist had no choice but to begin by pulling all the Fridge’s remaining teeth. He put screws in Perry’s jaw. Then he went in and implanted new teeth. A \$60K surgical process that the dentist donated, for the publicity of it. (So that he’d be a nameless dentist mentioned by a nameless pastor in a nameless town in Nebraska in 2009 – I’m not sure what the publicity did for him... but it saved Perry a few bucks.)

1. Perry went through incredible pain... not only for the first 45 years of his life... but it doesn’t take much to imagine the pain this procedure inflicted! Incredible pain.
  - a. Led to an even greater pleasure. The Chicago Tribune did an interview with Perry after the surgery. When Perry was asked about his new mouth, he exclaimed, “It’s unbelievable! And I love my new teeth... I got so tired of my mouth hurting all the time!”

*Craig Brian Larson, editor of PreachingToday.com; source: "A Story with some teeth: Fridge gets a new smile," Chicago Tribune (12-20-07) section 4, p. 2*

(A) You and I will walk through hard things in this life. Some of you are in the middle of such things, and it’s very painful right now for you.

A. *Romans 8:18-25* says, “long away,” “groan!” Let it out. Strain your neck and moan as you look for the Rescuer to come and free you from this bondage to decay.

1. But do this “in hope.” This truth is meant to strengthen you and me to endure pain today, with a powerful hope for tomorrow. Paul says this in *verses 24-25 – read*.

B. Does this truth do this for you? Does the truth that:

1. ...there is a God in full-control of the pain and frustration you’re going through,
2. ...and He’s using the pain and frustration for **good** purposes – to produce a hope in you for release... to prepare you to experience pleasure in a deeper, felt-need way?

D. Does that truth give you the resources you need to endure? To wait for your King to return and set things right? To wait patiently for your release from this hospital... either through death, or through His imminent return to earth?

1. Does this truth give you hope?
2. I hope so. I hope the promises in Romans 8 are so powerful for you in these ways. I don’t know how anyone can make it through this life without them, without this hope.
  - a. There’s simply too much loss and pain... life is too frustrating.

E. My prayer for us as we exit the “Hospital” series, and head toward Christmas, is that we know this hope personally.

1. That we know and worship the Savior and King who came to give us this hope in being adopted as sons and daughters of God, and lifted out of this world subjected to futility.