

# Groans

by Vance Havner

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*Vance Havner's sermon 'Groans' explores the theme of suffering in creation and the hope of redemption through Christ.*

**Duration:** 38:54

**Scripture:** Job 19:25

**Topics:** "Travailing"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher reflects on the wonder of the human body and how it is a masterpiece created by God. He emphasizes the limitations of our physical senses, stating that we can only truly connect with others through eye contact. The preacher encourages the audience to experience a foretaste of heaven in the present, suggesting that we can enjoy a glimpse of heavenly joy and glory before reaching the afterlife. He also references the longing for the future glory that is expressed in nature and in the writings of poets and songwriters.

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## Transcript

And we read, beginning verse eighteen, For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. There you have the groom, the suffering, and the glory, both in the same verse. For the earnest expectation of the creatures waited for the manifestation of the sons of God.

For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope. Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

Now there's another groan in the next verse, but we wait a moment for that. We have here the groaning of creation. Creation began with a garden, and every prospect was pleasing, and not even man was vile.

But the devil got into the garden, and sin began in the human race. And today we live in a ruined and wrecked world, still pretty in spots, but groaning in pain. The creatures of the animal world are under the reign of tooth and claw, and no matter how many pretty pictures of African jungle life or somewhere else may come out in National Geographic magazine or some other nature magazine, it doesn't tell the whole story, because there's an ugly side to nature, and there's indeed the reign of tooth and claw.

And if you're sensitive to the voice of nature, and I hope you are, you don't get salvation that way, but you get a lot of blessings because the God who created this is our Father. You can detect that groan that runs through creation today. My last conference, I've been resting for a couple of weeks, was up in New Jersey, Kesi.

And that's a wonderful spot. Plenty of room to walk, as much as I like walking. And lakes with ducks and geese and swans, oh, such an abundance of wonderful things.

Birds galore, and you know that I'm a confirmed bird watcher. John Stott, one of England's greatest preachers, is quite a bird watcher, and he took a text some time ago, consider the fowls of the air. He said, now that means watch birds.

Well, it does, and it pays for you to do that. But nature has a voice that I hope you are to some degree sensitive to. It has a testimony to God as Creator.

Some years ago, some travelers out in Africa were trying to sleep on the verge of the great desert out there. One of them was a veteran of that part of the country. The other, a newcomer.

During the night, the stranger woke up. The other man said, what is that sound, that weird, strange sound that I hear? And his companion said, it is the desert sighing. That's a pretty good way to put it.

I live just across the street from the University of North Carolina in Queensborough. They don't have much woods left there to what was the campus, and what little there is right across the street from where I live. During the spring and summer, I have been getting up early, make that a practice.

It has never made me healthy, wealthy, or wise, but I do it anyhow, because I like to. Somebody said one of the worst things about these folks getting up early, they like to brag about it. And I guess we do.

But I find myself getting up and going across to that little patch of woods to hear my favorite of all the birds, the woodbird, that sings his best, early in the morning and late in the afternoon. I go because he takes me back, turns time backwards in his flight, and makes me a boy again, back on the farm. When, even then, the wood thrush was my favorite bird, because I think he is the best bird singer in Eastern America.

And a rather remarkable flutist he is. He sounds more like a flute. Bird books all say that his song is so much the note of a flute.

Somebody said, if you saw a man seven feet tall coming down the street blowing a flute, what would you say? And somebody said, I'd say that's highfalutin. Well, this wood thrush is highfalutin, I tell you. He really does it.

And I don't think I'm stretching my imagination when I say that I do sense, I have better authority for that than myself, that I sense sometimes a longing on the part of nature for the manifestation of the sons of God. They may not know what that means, but there's a longing in the animate creation. I believe it.

Dr. A.T. Robertson, the great Greek scholar who not only taught Greek, but thought Greek, said, the mystical sympathy of physical nature with the work of grace is beyond the comprehension of most of us, but who can disprove it? You can't prove it. You can't disprove it. And then Goethe, the German writer, said, often have I had the sensation as if nature, in a wailing sadness, entreated something of me so that not to understand what she longed for cut me to the heart.

And old John Keble, who wrote so many wonderful songs, it was not in a poet's dream a little vaunt, an idle vaunt of song, which bids me see in heaven or earth and all fair things around strong yearnings for a blessed new birth with sinless glories crowned. Now, Mr. Keble felt that. He sensed and felt in his soul the groan that longs for the glory that is to come.

Have you ever had that in some favored spot? Up here's a good place. I take off every morning up this way, and these summers past, one of the little birds, the hooded warbler, most folks know he is such a bird, but he's been singing, I hope his progeny are still singing. I didn't hear him this afternoon.

It's not his favorite time anyhow. Maybe he'll show up in the morning. But you sense something that you can't put, as these men could not put into words.

It's a groaning world. And it's longing for something better. I don't know how much they know.

I don't know how they think or if they think in the sense that we do, but there's something there, and it's a groaning world of sorrow and heartbreak and suffering and pain. Have you ever wandered through a hospital for crippled children? Really crippled children. And if your emotions could stand it, got through it looking at these poor twisted little bodies, and you came out the last door saying, My God, why? Why do they? Why them? I don't have any answers for that.

You don't either. Or an old folks home. Lord bless them.

I wandered some of them in there years ago. Nobody loves them anymore. Nobody comes to visit some of them anymore.

Waiting to die. Can't die. There they are.

Longing. And we find ourselves praying that we may not have to reach that chapter in our lives. Or when I was in Arlington, Virginia in meetings, right near the great National Cemetery, morning after morning I would take off across those acres and acres and acres of graves where boys' bodies lie, faces turned toward God.

And then in France, the great, perhaps the great, I don't know the size of that one, but in Flanders fields where poppies grow, between the crosses, row on row, thousands upon thousands who died. You might say, To what purpose? And especially they have to say it after Vietnam. What was the use? You sense it.

Now, I'm coming to the glory, but you better have a heart that feels some of the groan of creation. Even teenagers today are not immune to the groan in life. They wouldn't have set a record for suicide in the last year or so.

Teenagers of all people, and a lot of them want to talk about death today. And they think about it more than you ever suspect. And there's worry and loneliness on the part of youth.

Well, I'm glad my Savior was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, touched with the feeling of our infirmities. But I move over to John 11, and there's some more groaning in that chapter. You remember, it's the scene at the grave of Lazarus.

And I get to verse 32. Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying unto Him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping, which came with her, he groaned in the Spirit, and was troubled,

and said, where have you laid Him? They told Him, Lord, come and see.

Jesus wept, the shortest verse in the Bible, but oh, there's plenty of distance in it too. Therefore, so that, again in verse 38, Jesus therefore again, groaning in Himself, cometh to the grave. Now, why did He groan? What was He groaning about? Why did He weep? Was He hesitant to bring Lazarus back into this wretched, poor world when He had got out of it and into a better one? I don't know.

I rather think that Dr. Robertson, my Greek scholar again, is right. And perhaps he surmised that the word snorting there, the word groaning there in the original, means snorting like an angry horse. As though my Lord was so mad at the devil for bringing about all this heartache and sorrow and wretchedness in this world that He groaned, but not exactly groaned, fumed with a holy indignation about it.

Now, we're to glory in tribulation, but we are not to glorify our tribulation. That's where some good people go wrong. They try to make sin and suffering, they try to make accident and disease, try to put a halo around it somehow.

It isn't in the book. Jesus said in Luke 13, 16 about that poor woman all bound over, this woman whom Satan hath bound. He put the discredit where it belongs.

He paid the devil in his own coin on that. And He said, the devil will cast some of you into prison. He didn't say the government will put you in jail.

The devil. And Paul wrote to the Thessalonians and said, I wanted to visit you, but I couldn't. And he didn't give that reason that we preachers like to give sounds so preachy.

I wasn't able to come because of providential hindrance. Sounds so good. Paul said, I couldn't get there because the devil hindered this.

And when he had that thorn in the flesh, he didn't say God sent it. He said it was the messenger of Satan. So let's get the record straight.

Don't glorify the trouble. You can honor God in the trouble. Sometimes God allows the trouble.

God allows some things to happen, and He causes some things to happen, permits some things to happen, but nothing ever happens because there's somebody on the throne of this universe, and things don't happen. I think he was grieved over the misery. Jesus knows all about our troubles.

The sympathizing Jesus, the great physician, He knows about it. But not only does creation groan, and not only did Jesus groan, but that verse that I stopped short of a little while ago, over there in Romans again, we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now, and not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our bodies. Dear friends, and some of you are old enough that you've been over a good year of the road.

You've had some groaning in your time, and we can have quite a discussion of that, and many times even the young are going through tragedy and trials sometimes we don't realize. I'm getting more letters today than I ever got in my life. In the past seven years, God made up to some extent for my awful loneliness by myself today, traveling about over the land, with some of the most precious letters from every direction of people in trouble.

When I wrote that little book, though I walked through the valley, it sort of loosened all that. The other day somebody out in South Dakota never knew him, never heard of him, said, I've got a boy four, and he's the apple of my eye. Would you mind writing a letter to him that I can read to him when he grows up? Now that's a new one for me.

I wrote it. I said, I don't know, I'll be gone when he reads it, but you find out what people are going through in this world. I find out I haven't had much trouble when I read some of the letters that I get.

The whole creation. And then I turn over to 2 Corinthians 5, and you're acquainted with that. Maybe that's taken right out of your experience.

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God and house not made with hands eternal in the heavens, for in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven. If so be it being clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan.

You got any groans, friends? We groan being burdened, not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon that mortality might be swallowed up of life. We're strange contractions. This human body is a... Any doctor can tell you that there's just no end to the wonder of a human body, how God produced it as His masterpiece.

Something strange about you and your body. I've never seen you, and you've never seen me. Do you know that? We go around in a body, that little machine God gave us to run around in, and we wear clothes, gradually getting away from that.

It looks like over a hundred. But a lot of folks, thank the Lord, still do. But I have never... The only way that you can come near, I look in your eyes, the windows of that body, and you're looking out at me, and I'm looking at you, and I say, yes, you can get to it.

You don't hear with your ears. Your ears don't hear. You hear with your ears.

Your eyes can't see. You see with your eyes. Your tongue can't talk.

Take your tongue out and lay it on the table. What would it start talking about? Your tongue can't talk. You talk with your tongue.

Now you take the tenet out of the tenement, and the tenement can't do a thing. Dust to dust and ashes to ashes. That's the end of it.

So there's something here, we call it soul, spirit, what you will, that operates all this apparatus. But one of these days, the tenements go into pieces. What happens to the tenet? Well, with the Christian, the spirit goes to be with Jesus.

Wonderful thing indeed. Absent from the body, present with the Lord. Paul said he had a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

Do you ever get homesick for heaven? You say, that's morbid. No, it isn't. Paul was homesick for heaven.

Said so. Why not? You've heard me tell about that fellow that was seasick, and he lost breakfast, lunch and supper all over the railing of the boat. One of these cheerful mortals who always comes along at the

wrong time.

Came along and slapped him on the back. Cheer up! Seasickness never killed anybody. He said, don't tell me that.

It's the hope of dying that's kept me alive this long. Sometimes I feel like it's the hope of dying that keeps me going. Because we've got something to look forward to.

I see nothing wrong singing in the sweet by and by, just because most of our church members have settled for the here and now. I still love the old song. The average church member has driven his tent pegs down in this world and is at home, thank you.

Not interested in the sweet by and by. Not interested in anything much but getting rich or being popular or having a good time down here. I think of that wild oak that was flying across on migration with his companions.

And he left them and came down into a barnyard. And the food was plentiful around there for him. And he stayed a week and stayed a month and stayed the whole season.

And then one day as he was feeding out there, he heard that familiar honk way up in the sky and sensed that his erstwhile companions were returning. He tried to reach them, tried to fly, but he had fed too well and could get no higher than the eaves of the barn. And then the story goes that he settled back down and said, let them go.

I like it here. And the day came when he never even heard them when they went over. I've known people who once had an experience with the Lord.

And then saw the world. He got his little innocent Bible sheet page. And they like it here.

There was a time in an old-fashioned song in an old town where some other sweet song would bring tears. Hearts had no desire to say words out so loud and caught the joyful sound the song would sing on higher ground. But you just speed long enough down here in this barnyard and that song won't move you anymore.

No sermon will move you anymore. You've settled down here. And I may be talking to somebody here tonight for however religious you may look in this meeting.

You have settled down here. This is home to you. You're satisfied.

No sermon is going to shake you much anymore. You don't have any yearning for the higher ground and the mount up with wings as eagles. It's a tragic thing indeed.

And so that duck stayed down there. And the last time he went swimming it was in his own gravy. And some people today are going to end up in a fix like that.

You're fixing a gravy now to die. Oh, but it says finally. In Romans 8, 26, we just can't get out of that one.

And it tells us that we are prayed for. Likewise, the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities, for we knew not what we should pray for as we ought. But the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be earthened.

I must confess to you that I hesitate when I come to that verse. I am so inadequate to sound the depths of it that about as far as I can get when I get to that verse is this. If the state of creation and our own condition is so serious that the Spirit of God intercedes for us in groaning beyond any words to express, we'd better get some groans into our own prayers.

And I don't detect much of that kind of praying anymore. We've got the happiness boys who are all running the religion racket these days. And it has become a show business.

And they've all got the heebie-jeebies. The church has swung from rigor mortis to St. Vitus. And we've got into there and everybody's tra-la-la.

And you're supposed to laugh all the time. And I believe in laughing and I use humor. But my friend, there's another side to this coin.

And if your heart has not been tuned to the agony, if you don't have any, the agony that your neighbor's got right down the street, or that folks all over town have got in this world, if you haven't got it tuned to that, something's wrong. Jesus was climbing the hill of Calvary. Over here was a crowd of women weeping, groaning I'm sure.

And my Lord on His way to die looked across and said, Don't cry for me. Weep for yourselves and for your children. I've been preaching sometimes to ladies' meetings on that subject.

And some of them don't appreciate it. And I can understand why. Jesus said, You don't need to cry for me.

I don't need anybody sobbing and sighing. I'm going up this hill on purpose. I'm not the victim of a mob.

I'm not going up there because I can't help myself. He had stood in the garden and said, I could call down 12 legions of angels if I wanted to. A legion for every one of you disciples.

And He said to Pilate, You couldn't do a thing. You don't have any power of yourself, only the authority it's given you. God, I'm going up this hill to die for the world.

Weep for yourselves, you women, and for your children, and it's enough to cry about. Weep for America. Too young to die.

I wrote a foreword to my preacher friend that's got a book out on that subject. It's a good book too. America's Too Young to Die.

And Joel said, The preachers need to be weeping for revival at the altar. Weeping for revival. But thank God it is from groans to glory.

We're on our way to a better world. And while the groaning may be unutterable, the Bible says the joy is unspeakable. That's two good words, isn't it? Unutterable? And you can't put words to some of you people here tonight.

I've faced people for 67 years in the ministry. And I've learned a few things. One is that we have managed to hide our real problems pretty well with a church face on Sunday morning, and a tough-head-out, stiff-upper-lip philosophy maybe.

But there's a groan there. And if we don't know what it is to be headed for glory, I don't know how they do it. I don't know how they stand it.

Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine. Our light affliction, which is but for a moment. You say, mine's not light, preacher.

Why do they say I'm light? Mine's pretty heavy. But for a moment, worketh for us a more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Our redemption draweth nigh.

Jesus is coming back in heal rain. Where'er the sun doth his successive journeys run. He's going to do that.

I don't know whether the planets will be in the heavenly arrangement or not. Maybe so. We can go pretty fast now in space, but then you can be anywhere your thought could take you.

I wouldn't be a bit surprised. I believe in the redemption of creation. Some people don't seem to understand that, that this present world, God's not going to let the devil get away with the mess that he's made with our help out of this beautiful world.

He's going to fix it up pretty again. I believe that with all my soul. And I see nothing that forbids believing that I may have the privilege of walking with my beloved in the resurrection body in a new earth.

They redeemed us. That's not the new heavens and the new earth. No.

But the earth's going to be redeemed. And the lion and the lamb will lie down together. And the lamb won't be on the inside of the lion either.

And all the saints will be given their resurrection bodies. And we'll walk together in what a glorious time that'll be. And God shall... I'm glad it doesn't say He had the angels to do it.

God shall take care of this personally. Wipe all tears from our eyes. Can you fathom the Almighty caring enough for us to do that? Oh, you say that's literal.

Well, if it's literal, the reality's always better than the symbol. I think that's pretty good myself. Things are passed away.

No more this. No more that. Going to the land of no more.

Straight country. And I think of that little boy who couldn't understand the song they sang in the revival. He said, where is that place, Dad? They were singing about some kind of a town called Dynamore.

And he said, well, I don't know. I know about Baltimore, but I never heard about Dynamore. He said, they're all singing, I'm going home to die no more.

Well, we are, thank God. We're all headed for Dynamore. That's a great place.

And it doth not yet appear what we shall be. Every time I look in the looking glass, that verse comes to mind. I say, Lord, you've got to improve on this.

I know I'm going to look better than this in the hereafter. It doth not yet appear. I mean, you could say the same thing, but I'm not going to embarrass you.

Oh, that's a great prospect. But I wish you'd go home and take out that red pencil and make a big ring around Hebrews 6. Every time we get into 6th chapter of Hebrews, everybody starts arguing about eternal security. Well, let's quit arguing about that, whatever you believe about it.

Until prayer, at least. And put a ring around where it speaks of those who have tasted the power of the age to come. Do you know what that means? It means that you can taste a little bit of heaven now.

The trees bend over the walls of the front now. Blessed is his mind, O taste of glory divine. I was in Texas years ago in a conference where a dear Dr. O'Brien, one of the churches in another city, was teaching a book of Job.

And I was preaching. And I remember that one night I talked about this foretaste of glory. And when we started to the hotel in his car, we never said a word to each other forever so far.

And all at once he just broke loose saying, we're marching to Zion, the verse that says, the hill of Zion yields a thousand sacred sweets before we tread the heavenly fields or walk the golden streets. Do you know what that means? You can taste some of it now. So why don't you take in a little bit of heaven before you get there? It's not going to get exhausted, the supply over there.

Enjoy a little of it now. And while creation grows, and we grow, and the Holy Spirit grows, we rejoice in that hope of glory. When my dear one lay just a few days from death, seven years ago, and I was here through that period and some of you were so gracious and wonderful to me.

She wrote. She couldn't talk. She had some kind of an instrument in her mouth to breathe with.

She couldn't breathe enough to get enough blood to her lungs to keep her going. But she could scribble a little and only I could read it then. But she wrote just this, My future looks dark.

Because it looked like if the very best she could do would be a wheelchair patient for the rest of her days. But God spared her that in a few days. My future looks dark.

I put that scrapbook on the left side and on the right side. I sent a line that her dear mother who went on to heaven not long ago at 98 years of age. And it said on that side that there's a precious birthday verse.

What looks dark in the distance will brighten as we draw near. So I get that out every once in a while. My future looks dark on one side but what looks dark in the distance will brighten as we draw near.

It has for both of them, thank God. Because it's all light over there. The Bible says there's no night.

I never did like night. I get up early in the morning and try to push the rest of it out. So the daylight is coming.

I just don't like night. And over there they don't have any. They don't have any lighting system for the light of the Lamb of God is the illumination system.

Isn't that right? That's great country. Over there, my future looks dark. No, no.

She didn't know how near she was to the world of life. And dear Mother Lord, at that age, her mind didn't operate much anymore like it did. God put some of us to bed in the dark but He'll get us all up in the morning.

And I'm sure of that. Well, I had a sermon that I preached a lot in those days on living in the great until. The Bible has so much to say about that until.

He which hath begun a good work will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. We're waiting until. He that hinders it is taken out of the way.

Judge nothing before the time until the Lord comes. Until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. Until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.

Until He puts all things under His feet. Until He subdues all things unto Himself. Sincere and without offense until the day of Jesus Christ.

Hold fast what you have until He comes. Showing forth His death until He comes. Occupy till I come.

Waiting until all His enemies be made His fishers. Did you ever read as many untils in all your life? The next time somebody wants to know what kind of just telling this until. Well, they may think you've got wheels in your head but you might get a word in there.

So that's where we are. We're living in the great until. And so when my dear one really neared the other side she left one other note.

I'm going through things I cannot tell you now until. And stopped. But has a swirl.

And the fact that we're going to glory makes it bearable sometimes. But you can't get this many people together without some dear people. Oh, if we took time and yet so many times it's the kind of thing you can't get up and tell anyhow.

But has it grown? Maybe it's lasted for years because of bereavement or some special sadness. Maybe you've got a physical condition that's causing you concern. You're driven that day when the doctor may have to look at you with that way that although he sort of halfway tries to hide it tells on itself.

Or maybe it's financial. Maybe it's what's going to happen in the economy. Maybe it's trouble in the family.

Maybe it's some young person. I don't know what God wants me to do. But my friend, it speaks well for you if you've got a serious concern about it.

Because you can't joke along the way of glory. You can laugh and sing to the praise of God. But while we make our way through.

Remember there's somebody in this meeting tonight who did a lot of groaning down here. And the Holy Spirit is even now praying for you with groaning that no words can express. Don't you think we'd better incorporate into our living a little more of that? Not pessimism.

Not going around wanting to cry on somebody's shoulder. Not that. It's the kind that we've been talking about.

And there's a groan in your heart and in your life. Jesus is here. He said we're two or three together.

He's there. We've heard it so much, we Americans, that it doesn't move us much anymore. Tell somebody on the mission field that finds out for the first time he can't sleep that night.

Never heard it. We go to sleep listening to it in America. But He's here.

And you could bow your head right back there for a closing prayer in a moment and just say, Lord, You know all about the groan, but I can't carry my burdens alone. But I roll them over on Thee. Cast Thy burden on the Lord and He'll sustain them.

And that's what I do. Turn it over to Him and then leave it there. Take your burden of the Lord and leave it right here in this tabernacle with Him and go out and take His word for it.

Because it works. I want to bear testimony that at my age and I'll be 79 in October, that although I've been lonely the last consecutive years, these have been, in summary, the most fruitful years of my life. And so, folks, this is a place where I can thank for your participation.

You don't have to sit and I'll say a few little things. You may have something in mind you don't know a thing in this world. You're the best.

Like old Freddy Fox said, give me a mountain. I told the young people, I said, I've got one advantage on you. I've been young and old both and you've just been young.

That gives me the edge on it, you see. So, but I'm so glad tonight that what will comfort my heart and has comforted your heart will comfort any heart if we remember that there's another G that I haven't got time to talk about, but it takes care of all of it. Thou lead from grace to glory and it's grace that takes care of all the glory and all the glory.

God bless you.

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