



# Sermon Growth Guide

**October 15, 2023**  
**Home is Out There**

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**Lead Me Home - Home is Out There**

**Romans 8:26-39**

**Key Verse:** Romans 8:28

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.

**Big Idea:** Home is on the way and that changes how I live and pray here and now.

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## Foundations

This week we continue in our **Lead me Home** series. Our theme is future-oriented. We are not yet home, but home is coming and it is real. Knowing this changes how we live and pray today.

As God's people, dearly loved and chosen, we are headed somewhere. We have a purpose. We are destined to be like Christ.

Paul's words today lean heavily on the Spirit's work in our lives. The Spirit, he writes, intercedes for us. Ruth Haley Barton, in her book *Sacred Rhythms*, writes this: "Intercessory prayer is more about recognizing that we do not know how to pray for others—or ourselves for that matter—but the Holy Spirit knows. Since we understand that the Holy Spirit is already interceding for us before the throne of grace, we can bring a name or a need, express it simply and in the silence experience our own groaning and the Holy Spirit's groaning for that person."

As you read this passage together, reflect on the fragile nature of life today. What makes your spirit groan? Are there concerns, weaknesses, agonies, people, or situations on your heart that you can simply acknowledge that you do not know what or how to pray for them?

## Understanding God's Word

Together, read Romans 8:26-30.

What do you learn about the Spirit's work?  
What do we learn about God's good work?

Read Romans 8:31-39.

What do we learn about the powers at work in this world? And God's power at work in us?

## Applying God's Word

Share about your prayer life. What does prayer look like for you? When do you pray? How does Paul's insight into the work of the Spirit in our prayers give you a new or different window into this discipline?

## Witnessing God's Word

Take some time to lift before God the worries on your heart—family, work, city, global, etc. As you lift these people and concerns before the Lord. Allow some silence for the Spirit to pray through you.

After you close your prayer time, talk about what the silence was like for you. Is it difficult or easy to be silent in prayer. Do you sense the Spirit is praying in those spaces?

Have someone close your time with a prayer of gratitude.

I find it very difficult to begin this message today. Good preaching, they say, carries the news in one hand and the Bible in the other. Sometimes the news is too much to carry. My eyes, like yours, are filled. Filled with images of the horror and barbarism mankind is capable of. Filled with images of women and children murdered, civilians brutalized and of that brutality being celebrated. I know that our culture has been desensitized; I know the lines between good and evil have been blurred intentionally for decades. There is a difference between good and evil. Even in warfare, within the horrible eventuality of conflict devolving to violence, there are morals. As an Army Chaplain I used to teach them. My eyes are too full of all this and with the tears. Keep praying for good to overcome, for love to overcome, for God to move.

Our passage meets us in our wordless grief and lament. When we don't know what to say, when we don't know how to pray, the Spirit helps us: "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." (Romans 8:26) Sometimes it is just beyond words. We have no words to string together to summarize or simplify or explain. It's just an open heart before the Lord, spirit to Spirit, crying "Abba! Help!" Or crying nothing at all; just open in silence as the Holy Spirit lifts what is needed before God on the throne. We are walking with Pastor Michael and his family through the heart surgeries their fourth child, Eden, requires. Last week, on the sixth day of her little life, she had open heart surgery (very successful, praise God!) that required her to lie still with her very chest, her tiny chest opened up for over 24 hours. Sometimes we just lie silent with our hearts open. The Holy Spirit prays for us. This is the Holy Spirit in a ministry of intercession. I am so glad you came to be together today in worship. I wish I could make you laugh, inspire you with witty remarks and send you out with a pep in your step. But, you know,

that is actually never what this is about. Together we come and bring in with us all the wounds and hurts of this world and the lives we live in it. Together we approach the Lord and declare the truth above all truths: "God, You are worthy of our praise." Together we feed on the Holy Word and we pray our hearts open, and it is God who comforts and sustains us. So, let's get into this Word together and find what we can to carry us forward today.

Yes, God is on the throne. That is our hope today. God will lead us home.

**Lead Me Home** is about understanding our own story as part of God's great story, the story of everything. Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation. Our moment is a very small moment in all that, but here we are, and we long for home. John 14:6 was a turning point. The promised Messiah, the Savior, the Shepherd who leads lost sheep home has come. Jesus has come. Jesus has died. Jesus has risen from the dead. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He is the way home and He is the one who leads us down that way. There is redemption in Christ, but how does it apply to me? As Origen of Alexandria said, "What good does it do me if Christ was born in Bethlehem once if he is not born again in my heart through faith?" What good does it do me that Jesus has done what He has done if it doesn't apply to my life? Exactly. Romans 8 shows just how salvation gets applied to our own lives, and what that means in the larger story.

All creation has been waiting for this turn, the turn away from decay and corrosion and chaos, and toward healing and restoration and life. That turn happens when Christ comes, Christ dies, and Christ rises from the dead. That turn happens when Christ's salvation is applied to your heart. When you believe, you connect with the turning, the renewing and redemption in Christ. Now all creation around you starts to feel the healing, and we are at our best when we participate in that. I hope my remarks

last week were not misinterpreted. We need to participate in creation care, good stewardship of nature and the animal kingdom, and social justice. My point last week is that we often jump into those activities to justify ourselves before we have been justified by putting our faith in Christ. This week we need to know, and we can know, that home exists, **Home Is Out There**. Peace with creation, peace with ourselves, peace with others and peace with God. It exists. It is not an empty dream and our God is able, our God is sovereign, our God is powerful, and He will get us home. It all rests on the power of God.

When we can't pray the Spirit prays for us. "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." (Romans 8:26) "In the same way" refers back to the last verse and the topic of hope. Worry borrows trouble from tomorrow to weaken you today; hope borrows promise from tomorrow to strengthen you today. Hope is our prompt: "I am not sure anyone could survive without hope." I had wanted to talk more about that, but I think it says it all. When we can't hope, the Spirit administers hope, the Spirit helps us to hope in our weakness. When we can't pray, the Spirit helps us to pray, the Spirit prays for us in our weakness. Our hope is not in our strength, but in the Lord God Almighty.

How powerful, how in-charge is God? "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." (Romans 8:28) Not all things are good, but in all things God works to bring about good. God can turn what was intended for evil into good. God can redeem what was bad and spoiled and ruinous and make it good and florid and beautiful. Don't believe me? Look at this cross. The most horrific instrument of death in the ancient world, perhaps in history, is now the strongest symbol of hope in

the world. It wasn't easy to make that change, but God did it. Can we pause on "all things"? All things. Nothing beyond the pale. That's easy with little inconveniences. My car didn't start this morning, but I missed a terrible meeting at work! God works in all things. #Blessed. It gets harder when all things includes war, terrorism, cancer, divorce, job loss, addiction. It gets harder when it includes the challenges our children face. Every child is born with a challenge, in the body, in the biochemistry, in the psyche, there is no child born free of the mark of original sin and the fall of mankind. Not one. Parents ache when they see their children suffer. All things. All things. God is able.

God is powerful to save us. The next group of verses are probably the strongest in the Bible about a doctrine we Presbyterians are famous for, predestination. "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. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." (Romans 8:29-30) God saves. Salvation belongs to the Lord. This is hard to understand because it sounds deterministic, like we have no agency, no freewill, no choice in the matter, and then that sounds like God saves some and damns others in an arbitrary way, which maligns the character of God and doesn't match the heart of Jesus. This is a complex doctrine. I'm not going to resolve it in just a few words. We do have free will and we do have agency, and no one is damned but by their own sin and rejection of Jesus. But at the heart of this doctrine is the comforting truth that our salvation does not depend on our performance. When once we put our faith in Christ, we look back and say, not, "Good job me for picking Jesus," but, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9) God is able. Our hope

is not in our own power, but we hope in the power of the Lord God Almighty.

So, then what is our position in this world? What is our threat level? “What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:31-32) Well, a lot of people can be against us. But what good can they do? What ultimate harm can they do? Their evil is like a shadow, as cold and dark as it is, it doesn’t last. Can anyone bring a charge that will stick? “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.” (Romans 8:33) If you are justified by faith in Christ, there is no charge. No charge. No condemnation. “Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” (Romans 8:34) We repeat this often in liturgies of confession and forgiveness. There is only one righteous judge; only one who earned the right to judge others by living a sinless life. And what is He doing? His name is Jesus, and He is at the throne of the Father appealing for us, interceding for us, arguing for our forgiveness on the grounds of His own wounds. Will Christ betray His own atoning sacrifice for us? Of course not. No charge. No condemnation. No separation. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?” (Romans 8:35) A sword can do damage. Trouble and hardship can cause great pain. Persecution and famine, nakedness, danger, these are real things, and expected things, things to expect to experience and see others suffer or suffer ourselves before our days are out. These are real things. They can do harm. They cannot separate you from the love of Christ.

“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” (Romans 8:37) Here is the gospel news, the God’s eye perspective: “more than conquerors.” What does that mean? More

than conquerors. We don’t just win. The Christian walk is not about defeating our enemies and hearing them wail. More than conquerors means that in Christ, in the power of God, what was meant for evil gets turned for good. What was meant for destruction and horror gets turned for upbuilding and peace and even joy. In the great turning, which takes the depth of sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the perfect man, dying the most horrific death; it takes the highest of the high going down to the lowest of the low; it takes the perfect sacrifice of the perfect man on the cross to make this spin start; but in the great turning we are more than conquerors. One day you will see, from the perspective of heaven, how every single horror, every single enemy act, God spun and redeemed and transformed and converted to render to His ultimate glory. You will see it.

I once met an assassin for Yasser Arafat—he is now an evangelist for Christ. I sat just last night with Tamrat Layne, once the rebel leader of a communist guerilla army overthrowing the government of Ethiopia, now a man of Christ, who converted in prison, saw his friends come to Christ, saw his wife come to Christ, saw the man who had been sent to his prison cell to murder him come to Jesus. That’s more than conquerors. You don’t just win the battle; God wins by changing the whole story. That is our hope. Not our strength to win, but our hope is in the Lord God Almighty.

So, I close with this. Is this not one of the greatest passages in your Bible? “For I am convinced.” Powers are real. Evil is real. Angels and demons, spiritual powers and forces. The present nor the future—that’s time, our past, our present, our future. Height nor depth—that’s space, material space, our bodies, our material realities. Life itself; death itself. “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39) In this we hope. Our true home is out there.