

The Groans of Growing, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. PE060604
Romans 8:22-27 and Acts 2:1-21
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When you are a teenager, sometimes it's downright embarrassing have your parents around. They dress in out-dated styles. They say embarrassing things to your friends. They take pictures of you when you are performing. You want to say, "tsk, there they go again!" We groan inside in our silent embarrassment or groan outwardly to our friends about our parents. This is just one of many groans when we're growing.

There are physical groans. When your bones grow, sometimes the joints don't grow at the same rate and you experience pain and you groan as you walk. For girls, there is the groan of your monthly menstrual cycle. On the day after a vigorous soccer practice, you groan from muscle aches.

There are emotional groans. There is the groan of emotional pain when a boyfriend or girlfriend dumps you for someone else. There is a groan when your parents make you get dressed to go to church early Sunday morning after a long tiring Saturday night.

At the same time, there are groans for parents. That is why they're called "groanups." They are filled up with groaning! The smile of joy when they pick up a baby turns to a groan when they smell the little gift in a diaper. They groan when a letter begins, "Dear parent, As Frieda's teacher, I'm concerned that her test scores are below her capabilities and I am requesting a meeting with you." Parents groan when their precious daughter greets her new date at the door and he's wearing holey jeans, spiked green hair and an earring! They groan when driver education begins and groan louder when the auto insurance bill arrives with a new young driver included on it.

All this groaning begins with the greatest groan— that of a mother in giving birth. The excruciating pain of abdominal contractions precedes the wonderful miracle of the gift of new life. When the baby is finally pushed out into world, there is relief, joy, and the groan of satisfaction.

All of the groans of growing are really good. The groan over parents with a camera simply means the parents are proud of you. That should feel good. Grownup groans simply mean a child is maturing to be able to make his or her own decisions on the way to becoming an adult. The groans of kids really assert that kids are learning their own thoughts. The groans of growing are wonderful gifts attesting to the birth of new life.

Paul used the image of the groan of childbirth to talk about a cosmic new rebirth. He said the whole world was groaning in the pain of childbirth. He was talking about a new age: an age dominated by Christ. This was to be a new cosmic order governed by love, justice, and serving others.

When we try to live according to Jesus' teachings, it can be painful. Others will laugh at you because you are not cool. They will try to get you to fight back. They may ask you to try drugs, or steal, or to make fun of new class member. When you stick to Jesus' teachings of turning the other cheek instead of fighting back, of befriending a kid with a funny walk or strange smelly clothes, the "really cool kids" may make fun of you.

There will be further groans as you run up against values different than Christ's values. You will be tempted to give up concern for the less fortunate. It is easier to join in with the crowd as

they taunt an ethnic minority or a physically disabled person. You, because of your new birth, must always ask yourself, "How would Jesus treat that person?"

Sometimes, you will feel like dry bones. The prophet Ezekiel used the image of a valley of dry bones to describe the defeated nation Israel back in the Seventh Century before the Christian Era. The people were hopeless, defeated, worn out and tired.

Sometimes you will feel hopeless, defeated, worn out, and tired. Sometimes you'll feel like giving up. God can fill you with spirit and give you life and the ability to carry on, but you have to be in touch with God's spirit. Keep in touch by reaching out in prayer and Bible reading and by sticking with kids who also live by Jesus' values and standards.

At other times, you will be asked by God to fill others with God's spirit. You will feel like you are preaching to a bunch of bones: people with no hope in them. Yet, by speaking God's word of love, of peace, and of hope, those dried bones can rattle, come to life, and stand up and love and serve and praise God.

The pains and groans are worth it. We have the hope of a new and better world, and if we live it in our actions, it will come about sooner. There is the groaning and creaking of a whole structure as the foundation shifts. You must formulate your own foundation of faith. You will have to throw off the faith of your parents, teachers, and minister. As you doubt, and study, and question, and pray, God will give you your faith. Own it for yourself and live it. Remember that at the end, you have to face God by yourself. Forget peer pressure; do what you think God wants you to do.

Today is Pentecost, the birthday of church. The Holy Spirit came on Pentecost and empowered the early disciples to begin serving and preaching. That started the church. That is why we have confirmation on Pentecost. It is the birthday of church.

You members of the confirmation class are about to take the biggest step in your life. It is similar to marriage, when you select a partner for life. Today, you are selecting Jesus Christ as a partner. You are making a commitment to him and his ways: to live your lives the way he did; to treat others the way he would treat them. You are about to confirm your baptism, to get rid of selfish motivations, to get rid of the pressure of friends and peers, to feel clean and fresh and new.

The rest of us should remember that these are not the church of tomorrow, they are the church of today, loving and serving God and serving the needs of the world.