



LifeLight

"In Him was life, and that life was the light of men." John 1:4

Romans, Part 2



ROMANS 8 – 16

LEADERS GUIDE

Earl H. Gaulke, editor

Revised from material prepared by David Lumpp and Dean Nadasdy

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Introduction

Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

In-depth means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

The Assistant Director (*optional*)

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (**Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 9.**) The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;

- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer), using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other, outside sources;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership team and discussion leaders meetings.

The Small-Group Coordinator (*optional; the director may fill this role*)

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership team and discussion leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (**Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 49.**) There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than 12 participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session (see p. 49);
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;
- guide and facilitate discussion in their small group;
- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;

- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion leaders training meetings.

Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week's work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1¹/₂-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week's lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week's assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.
2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of 12 or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week's study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small

groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week. Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another five minutes before dismissal.

In some places some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). They will follow the same schedule, but they may use a cassette tape to listen to the week's lecture presentation. The discussion leader will obtain the tape and leaflets from the director. A cassette tape version of the lecture is available for purchase from CPH (see your catalogue). Or a congregation may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

Recommended Study Resources for Romans

Concordia Self-Study Bible, New International Version. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986. Interpretive notes on each page form a running commentary on the text. The book includes cross-references, a 35,000-word concordance, full-color maps, charts, and time lines.

Franzmann, Martin H. *Concordia Commentary: Romans.* St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968. This narrative commentary by the late New Testament professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, is directed to those "who are looking for something less technical and more devotional than customary studies of the New Testament." Presented in a readable, nontechnical style. 288 pages.

Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans.* Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1945.

This older volume is a reliable, comprehensive, confessionally sound commentary by a Lutheran theologian.

Luther, Martin. *Lectures on Romans. Luther's Works.* Edited by Hilton C. Oswald. Vol. 25. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972. Notes written for Luther's own use in the lecture hall.

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary.* St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979. This one-volume commentary on the Bible contains 950 pages and is tailored for lay use.

Every Voice a Song Pipe Organ Accompaniment for 180 Hymns and Liturgy. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-1565). Use this music CD for worship hymn accompaniment.

Life through Christ's Spirit

Romans 8:1–27

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, for His righteousness has been given freely to those in whom God's Spirit has worked saving faith. The Holy Spirit directs our eyes to the work of Jesus Christ, empowers us to lead a sanctified life, and even enables us to pray.

Objectives

That the participant, as a child of God and with the Holy Spirit's help, will be led to

1. come to recognize that God's Word of "no condemnation" for the sake of Jesus Christ ends the accusation of the Law and frees us from preoccupation with our sins;
2. be assured of the Father's pardon, which sets us free from the rule of sin and death;
3. be assured that we are God's children and that He intercedes for us with the Father;
4. look to the Spirit to sustain sure Christian hope and anticipate eternal life with God in His new creation.

Note for small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 51.

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn and prayer printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). Note: Concordia Publishing

House has available *Every Voice a Song*, a 9-CD set of organ accompaniments for 180 hymns and liturgy. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

Occasionally we will see a sign outside a store that tells us the store is now "under new management." That same sign could be worn by every Christian, for the Christian is someone who is now under new management.

We were under the management of the sinful nature—and to the extent that we continue to give in to the urgings of the sinful human nature we are still under its management. But because we Christians have been brought to faith in Jesus through the work of the Holy Spirit, and because the Spirit now lives within us, we are now under the Spirit's management.

When a store comes under new management, the place may be refurbished. New slogans may mark its advertising. The store may offer special bargains. The new management may make quite a difference. And that is the way it is with us when we come under the new management of the Spirit. It makes quite a difference in us too. In Romans 8:1–10 Paul spells out the difference in our lives when we come under the management of the Spirit.

1 God Has Set Us Free from the Law of Sin and Death (8:1–4)

January 1, 1863. That date may not ring a bell. It occurred, as you know, during the American Civil War. On January 1, 1863, all slaves in states in rebellion against the United States government were declared to be free by the Emancipation Proclamation of President Abraham Lincoln. What the proclamation brought about in these states was to take effect permanently

throughout the nation when the Thirteenth Amendment became a part of the Constitution in December 1865.

Paul declares us to be emancipated—set free—from the law (or control) of sin and death. And how were we set free? Not by keeping the Law. (8:3) For the Law was powerless to set us free from sin and death. This was not because the Law was no good. (7:12) Paul has already said that the Law “is holy, righteous and good.” But the Law had nothing to work with. (8:3) “It was weakened by the sinful nature.” No matter how capable a military leader might be, no campaign is won with inadequate troops. And the Law had no adequate troops in our human nature with which to win the fight against sin and death. Our sinful nature is no match for temptation and death.

No, the Law could not win against sin and death. So, what the Law could not do, God did. (8:2) “Through Christ Jesus the law [or controlling power] of the Spirit of life set me free from the law [or controlling power] of sin and death.” (8:1) The result is that “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

God sent a new force against the enemy—His own Son, Jesus. Jesus joined our army; He put on our uniform. (8:3) God sent “His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so He condemned sin in sinful man.”

Perhaps you remember the old-time western movies, or maybe you’ve seen them on late-night TV. An often-repeated scenario in such thrillers had the brave but outnumbered settlers in a wagon train surrounded by attackers. Just when the settlers were about to be finished off, what did we hear in the background? That’s right! The bugle call to “Charge!” And here came the cavalry over the hill to save the wagon train.

That’s the scenario in Romans. (5:6) “At just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.” Jesus came along—dressed in our uniform, under the flag of our leader, the Law—and rescued us from sin and death (8:4) “in order that the righteous requirements of the Law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”

What an exciting rescue!

2 What a Contrast We See between the Control of Sin and Death and the Control of the Spirit (8:5–11)!

Picture two children. One child is in the charge of a harsh and vindictive parent. Every time the child makes the least mistake, the adult screams at the child and strikes the child. As a result, the child is fearful and resentful. The other child is in the charge of a kind and helpful parent. Every time this child makes a mistake, the adult gently and lovingly corrects the child and encourages the child to do better. As a result, the child is confident and respectful.

I know that these are caricatures of real parents. But they do not caricature the contrast between living under the control of sin and death and living under the control of the Spirit. Listen to this contrast (8:5–8): “Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.”

What a contrast! Aren’t you glad you don’t have to live under the control of the sinful nature, held in the grip of sin and death? For you *don’t!* Remember? (8:2) “Through Christ Jesus the law [or control] of the Spirit of life set me free from the law [or control] of sin and death.” The fact is that you (8:9) “are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.” All Christians are indwelt by God’s Spirit—that’s part of being a Christian.

But wait a minute! I know I am a Christian and the Spirit of God lives within me. By God’s grace and power I do believe in God. I do worship and praise Him. I do desire and try to do His will. I do! But I also don’t. I continue to sin every day too, no matter how hard I try not to. I believe, but I still have my doubts too. I have spiritual joy, but I also have my blue days. Does this mean that I am not really a Christian after all, that I don’t have the Spirit as I thought I did?

Not at all! Remember that the same Paul who is writing chapter 8 also wrote chapter 7, where he shared with us his continuing struggle against the sinful nature within

him. Remember his anguished cry (7:24–25), “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” Then he declared, “Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

While we are in this life, our minds are a battleground between sin and death on the one hand and the Spirit on the other. While we are alive through the Spirit, who lives within us, we carry around the “body of death,” the sinful human nature. We are, at the same time, saints—holy people because of the righteousness of Jesus given to us as a gift—and sinners. (8:10) “But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.”

What a wearying situation! But we will not always be this way. Someday God will deliver us completely from the “body of sin” clinging to us, and then we will be completely emancipated. Then the weakness we experience in this life and the consequences we suffer because of that weakness—sickness, frustration, depression, death—will be a thing of the past. (Revelation 21:4) “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” What a blessed and wonderful some day that will be! (8:11) “And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you.”

3 We Have a New Relationship with God (8:12–17)

Even now, however, though we are not yet in heaven, we carry about a little bit of heaven inside of us. For we have a wonderful secret: We are God’s dear children. Even that doesn’t quite say it. Let’s use a contemporary word that really says it better: We are God’s kids. And He is our Daddy. That’s right. That’s what Paul really says. He uses an Aramaic word, *Abba*, that has all the intimacy of “Daddy.” God is not just our Father in the formal, distant sort of way that word is sometimes used. He is also our Daddy.

And you know that kids can claim a loving attention from their daddy that cuts through all distance and formality. Perhaps you remember seeing pictures of the children of President John F. Kennedy, Caroline and John, stealing into the Oval Office and crawling under

the President’s desk. That sort of behavior in such a lofty setting is surprising—and charming. It is the sort of behavior kids can get away with, with their daddy.

We enjoy such a privilege and responsibility as God’s kids. (8:15–16) “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” What a wonderful privilege is ours! The Almighty God, the Maker of this vast universe with all its awesome power, is our Daddy. Like President Kennedy’s children stealing into the Oval Office, we can come into the courts of heaven at any time. The door is open to us. We may “ask Him as dear children ask their dear father” (Luther’s Small Catechism).

And not only do we now enjoy the privilege of access into the heavenly Oval Office through prayer, but we are also His heirs. (8:17) “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory.” We are members of the family and heirs to the family fortune. We were not born into this family, for we were born under the control of the sinful nature. But we were adopted into this family through Holy Baptism, and adopted children are just as much members of the family as the natural children. Adopted children inherit the family fortune just as surely as the natural children do. We are “co-heirs with Christ.” Someday we will come into our own; we will “also share in His glory.”

But, in the meantime, we also share in the family’s sufferings. (8:12) “We have an obligation” to live with our family in its trials as well as in its triumphs. We cannot live with another family until our own family’s fortunes improve. (8:14) “Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” We will enjoy the inheritance someday (8:17) “if indeed we share in His sufferings” today. Joining the family now means sharing in the family’s hardships now “that we may also share in His glory.”

4 Now We Have Pain, Promise, Patience, and Prayer (8:18–27)

(8:18) For “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” How we will look back then and smile at what we are going through now. We can still relate to Paul’s anal-

ogy, for the anxiety before childbirth is still there, and childbirth is still work for the mother. But what parent does not know the joy of holding that newborn child and looking with love into that little, crinkled, frowning, adorable face?

That is the way it is with us, Paul says. We are like a woman in the midst of childbirth. No, wait! Paul expands the idea. We are also like the baby who is being born. (8:23) "We ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." We are being born, and this life with its pressures is the birth canal. The glory of the life to come is the great, wide world into which we will emerge.

But we are not alone in this birth process. In fact (8:19, 22), "the creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. . . . The whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time." Paul hints that the whole creation has a stake in the glory that will be revealed, just as the whole creation was (8:2-21) "subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God."

John, in the Book of Revelation, expands the hint of what is yet to come when he tells us,

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea [no longer anything untamed and threatening or frightening]. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem [the church], coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God."

Revelation 21:1-3

What a promise appears in these hints about our heavenly inheritance! What encouragement they give us to

be patient as we wait for their fulfillment!

And patience is what we now need. Patience and hope. (8:23, 25) "We wait eagerly," and "we wait for it patiently." But we wait in hope already certain of what we have not yet experienced. (8:24) And "in this hope we were saved." Hope already has what it is waiting for and yet does not have it. (8:24) For "who hopes for what he already has?"

Parents who are in the midst of adopting a child know something of this hope. They have been approved and will receive a child. This they have been told. But when? One such expectant mother remarked ruefully, "A mother waiting to give birth knows she will have a child in about nine months. But a mother waiting for a child by adoption can be pregnant for as long as two years!"

Patience. And prayer. (8:26-27) "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 with groans that words cannot express. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."

Have you ever asked someone to pray for you? I'm sure you have. We feel comforted in the knowledge that others are praying with us. And have you also said, "I don't even know what to pray for" or words to that effect? How encouraging to know that someone, whose head is clearer at the moment, is praying with us! This person will know better what ought to be asked. And if that person is experienced in prayer and knowledgeable of God's will as revealed in the Scriptures, so much the better. We need prayer allies like that!

How about the best prayer partner of all—the Holy Spirit Himself! If anyone knows how our prayer ought to be said, He does! If anyone knows the mind of the Lord, He does! If anyone knows our real needs, He does! What a prayer partner we have as we wait patiently for our dreams to come true, for our hope to be fulfilled!

Concluding Activities

Speak a prayer to the Holy Spirit, thanking Him for His presence and power in our lives and asking Him to assume even greater control over us. Then make any necessary announcements and distribute study leaflet 2.

Notes

More than Conquerors

Romans 8:28–9:9

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

In Jesus Christ, God does literally everything for our salvation: He has chosen us from eternity, justified us, and keeps us for Himself. Literally nothing—not even suffering or death itself—can separate us from the love of God in Christ. When many Israelites failed to receive Jesus as the Messiah, it was not because God's Word failed or because God is unjust, but because those Israelites hardened their hearts in unbelief.

Objectives

That the participant, as a child of God and with the Holy Spirit's help, will be led to

1. recognize that God's providential hand extends to every aspect of life;
2. recognize that salvation is accomplished entirely by God, from its beginning in eternity through God's action in Jesus Christ, through our preservation in the faith;
3. be confident that everything God does for us today He determined to do in Jesus Christ from all eternity;
4. rejoice that in Jesus Christ we may triumph over any and every temporal crisis, for we have God's promise that nothing can separate us from His love manifested in Jesus Christ.

Note for small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 54.

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn and prayer printed in

the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index), or on the *Every Voice a Song* CD set.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

Have you suffered some great disappointment in life? If so, you are among a large group of people. Great disappointments in life are so common as to be commonplace. Who does not know someone whose ambitions for a career have been disappointed, at least to some degree? Who does not know someone whose hopes for a lasting, happy marriage have been disappointed? Who does not know someone whose hopes for their children have been disappointed? The list could go on, but I suppose it would just become saddening.

The point is, disappointment is a common experience in life. And, in this respect, we are like God. For God, too, has experienced major disappointments. Surprised? It is true. First, God was disappointed when the people He had created and on whom He lavished so much care and love chose to disobey Him and to plunge the universe He had created into ruin and misery. What a disappointment! This was God's first and greatest disappointment.

But there was a second disappointment, and this also caused God sorrow. In fact, this second disappointment moved the Son of God to tears. (Luke 19:41–42) "As He approached Jerusalem and saw the city, He wept over it and said, 'If you, even you, had known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.'" This second disappointment to God was Israel's rejection of the Savior God sent them, a Savior Israel had awaited for so many long centuries. What a disappointment!

But God is a creative God. God can not only make a world out of nothing, He can also pick up the broken pieces of the shattered world and remake it into His new creation. Our study this week and the next two

weeks will show us how God has creatively picked up the broken pieces of this disappointment and refashioned His kingdom.

1 God Is for Us (8:28–39)

“If I could just be sure!” How many times have you said that? There may be some things in life that leave us uncertain. Some seem important, others trivial. Should we buy a new car or keep the old one limping along a little longer? Do I look better in green or blue? But the main things in life are certain. God has made them certain through Jesus our Savior.

It is certain that God will bring about good for me, because when all is said and done I will pass from this life into the glory of heaven. (8:28) For “we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.” Whatever unfolds in my life between now and heaven, I can be absolutely certain that I will end up there. The destination is certain; it is the route that can leave us wondering.

Perhaps you like to watch TV dramas built around adventures. The individual episodes might keep us biting our nails and sitting on the edges of our seats. But one thing we can be sure of—the hero or heroine will survive! We may not know how, and we may die a thousand deaths in the meantime, but they will survive to be there again next week. Our salvation is like that. It is clear and certain. No outside power can prevent us from being saved. God has laid out a clear track to glory. No obstacle can keep us from arriving in heaven. (8:29–30) “For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified.”

See how God has planned and prepared each step of your salvation! He started even before you were born. He looked ahead in time (as we look ahead in distance), saw you, and determined to save you. Carefully He arranged everything just so. Not a step was left to chance; not a piece was left out. Your salvation was preplanned and prearranged.

Now we see how God’s planning has worked out. For

we have seen how God sent Jesus into this world at Bethlehem. We have seen how Jesus perfectly obeyed God’s will on our behalf. We have seen how Jesus went to the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. We have seen how Jesus died and then rose again. We have seen how Jesus ascended into heaven, to sit at God’s right hand as our heavenly representative. And here is the result of all that rose again. We have ascended into heaven, to sit at God’s right hand as our heavenly representative. And here is the result of all that:

If most participants have the same Bible version, invite them to read Romans 8:33–37 aloud with you.

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? 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. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For Your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered” [Psalm 44:22]. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

You see, God has thought of everything. (8:31–32) “God is for us,” and He “did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all.” What else can matter? If our destiny is decided on a balance scale and God gets on one side of the scale, what can be put on the other side of the scale to outweigh Him? Nothing! Absolutely nothing! “God is for us,” and God “gave Him [His Son] up for us all.” God has declared you innocent; who can say you are guilty? God speaks for you; who can speak against you? God is holding on to you; who can tear you away? Jesus Himself replies (John 10:28–30), “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”

(8:35) But what about “trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?”

Come on! Get serious! (8:38–39) “I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, nei-

ther 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." Any more questions?

Perhaps you are—or were at one time—a fan of vampire movies or stories. If so, you know a sure way to protect yourself from a marauding vampire: just hold a cross between you and the vampire! He cannot advance past the cross. Well, that's the way it really is, only you hold the cross of Jesus before you by faith. Absolutely nothing will be able to take you away from God.

Talk about certainty! God is for you! Now everything has to come out well for you in the end. When the hour is up, it will still be God and you—just like that!

Hold up two fingers held tightly against one another.

2 What Went Wrong (9:1–13)?

But now Paul brings up a case that would appear to undermine all of his certainty that God's good will will indeed be done. What about the Jewish people, most of whom did not believe in Jesus, despite the fact that Jesus Himself was a Jew? If any group of people were to be saved, surely it would have been Israel. Paul emphasized (9:4–5), "Theirs is the adoption of sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship, and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen."

The remembrance that Israel had largely rejected the Messiah despite these many advantages is painful to Paul. For Paul is Jewish; these are his fellow countrymen, his relatives. Paul blurts out (9:1–4), "I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel."

Such an anguished outcry we seldom find in Scripture. Certainly Paul's readiness to sacrifice his own salvation if it would bring about the salvation of others underlines his own sense of desperation. Paul's feelings of personal disappointment run deep—just as Jesus' own disappointment over Israel's rejection brought the Savior to tears. (8:39) But what about the damage this fail-

ure does to Paul's conviction that nothing "in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord?" Doesn't this failure upset Paul's argument and put us back into a sinkhole of uncertainty regarding God's choice and our salvation? After all, as Paul will say later, God had chosen Israel, and (11:29) "God's gifts and His call are irrevocable."

This development does not at all undermine the certainty of our salvation, Paul replies (9:6), "It is not as though God's Word had failed." God's Word has not failed; many of Israel's descendants failed to receive that Word in faith. God has held out a sure and certain salvation to them, but they refused it. No one can snatch us out of God's hand, but we may refuse His hand and be lost in spite of that outstretched hand.

For salvation is received through faith, not through physical descent, and those who believe, whether Jews or Gentiles, make up Israel, the people of God. This has always been so. Paul pulls two examples from the Old Testament to make his case.

Next week, we follow Paul's argument regarding the second Old Testament example.

Conclusion

God determined to save the world He had made when that world plunged itself into sin. He was determined to effect that salvation and to allow no one to stand in His way. No matter how hard some resisted Him, God would not stop until He had won His people.

Concluding Activities

Read Romans 8:31–39 once more aloud and with conviction. Before class, ask four of your better or more confident readers to read the passage, dividing the verses in this way: 31–32, 33–34, 35–36, and 37–39. Then have all participants respond with a rousing "Amen!" Then make any necessary announcements and distribute study leaflet 3.

Notes