Study 1 - Romans 8:1-8

Read Romans 8:1-4

1) What is the good news for followers of Jesus in this passage?

2) How have you experienced the joy of knowing there is now 'no condemnation'?

Read Romans 8:5-8

3) What is the call on the lives of those who follow Jesus in this passage?

Paul Miller writes, "We love the gift of justification by faith - believing the gospel. Nothing is more liberating than realizing God welcomes sinners ... But we recoil from the second gift - becoming like the gospel."

4) Sometimes we can "recoil" from becoming like the gospel. What can that recoil look like in everyday life?

5) What might it look like to lean into that opportunity for change rather than recoil?

Tim Keller has suggested, a Christian's calm and poise in the face of difficulty "may be the most telling way to judge if a person is drawing on the resources of the gospel in the development of personal character."

Paul Miller writes similarly, "Faith undermines our need to boast, to constantly defend and display ourselves; it kills the boast. It kills, in principle, a touchy, defensive spirit."

He also writes about the time he first connected God's justification of him with how he related to another person.

> "When our son Andrew was three, he often asked for a drink in the middle of the night. I'd stumble out of bed, get a paper cup from the bathroom dispenser, fill it with water, and take it to him. Often, several hours later, he'd ask for a second cup. So to save myself a second trip, I began to get two cups of water on the first trip. The problem was that paper cups would sweat; the second cup left a stain on the dresser.

My wife Jill asked me not to take the second cup, so I said OK and took just one cup. That's what good husbands do.

Several weeks later, about six o'clock in the morning, Jill called from Andrew's bedroom, "Paul, you left a paper cup on the dresser! Don't leave paper cups on the dresser."

I stood in the closet where I was dressing, thinking, "I only took one paper cup." I bristled at Jill's presuming I had left the second paper cup. It implied that I was the kind of husband who leaves paper cups on dressers. I was about to correct Jill's declaration of me as a failure as a husband, as unrighteous, when I remembered Paul's words: "the righteousness from God that depends on faith."

Reflecting on the gospel helped me realize that my haste to correct Jill's opinion of me was a form of self-righteousness. While it is entirely appropriate to defend ourselves from false accusations - Jesus and Paul do it frequently - what struck me was my *rush* to defend myself. I didn't want a vague, detached righteousness from God; I wanted a "real" righteousness of my own, a righteousness with substance. Jill was declaring me unrighteous, and I wanted her to declare me righteous! I wanted Jill to justify me, not God.

For the first time in my life, I connected God's justification of me with how I related to another person. The result? I shut up. I didn't defend myself. I quietly rested in "the righteousness from God that depends on faith". My silence was a form of love. Love comes from faith.

What about the paper cup? Who left it? It was likely me. Either I forgot or it was the original cup I got on the first trip. But, really, who cares? That's what faith does. You see, realizing I was justified by faith in that moment killed my desire to create my own identity. Not defending myself over a paper cup was a big step in putting feet on what it means to believe the gospel in everyday life.

Notice how the gospel reshaped my feelings. If you had asked me when I was about to defend myself, "What are you feeling?" I would have said, "unappreciated, hurt, and criticized unfairly." That's the victim narrative of *feelism*, The gospel destroys the victim narrative that led to those feelings and replaced it with peace."

6) What is one area of life where your faith/justification could affect how you respond to others and think of yourself?

7) Where is God inviting you not just to believe the gospel, but to become more like it this week?

Read Romans 8:9-14

1) Where are we as followers of Jesus?

Paul Miller gives an example of how our 'location' changes how we respond to the situations around us.

> "When my youngest daughter, Emily, was in the eleventh grade, she and her friend were benched. The word on the team was that the coach was playing favourites. Neither Emily nor I enjoyed this … I asked her if she wanted me to talk to the coach, but she said, "No, I'll do it Dad." I was thankful for her maturity.
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> I ran into another parent at the gym during all this, and she said, "I can't believe what the coach is doing with Emily and her friend." I said, "I'm actually thankful Emily has this low-level suffering on my watch. Life is much more like sitting on the bench than starring in a game." I can still see the shock on this mom's face. It was like she had met a martian.
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> While our children played hockey at the same Christian school, in that moment, this mom and I were living in separate worlds. I'd spent the last fifteen years in a multilayered *fellowship of his sufferings*, so *in Jesus* had become a way of life for me. For that reason, when Emily encountered suffering, I was disappointed but not devastated, even thankful for an opportunity for her to be drawn into Jesus. My thankfulness startled this mom. It seemed strange to her.
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> We were both looking at the same scene: two girls sitting on a bench. But our *locations*, what we were *in*, shaped what we saw. The mom saw disaster; I saw an opportunity for Emily to be drawn into a *fellowship of his sufferings.*
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> Sports, of course, is not the problem. The problem is sports as an idol.
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> The mom assumed we were both *in sports.* She was being kind, empathizing with me that my source of life (sports) was cut off. She was attempting to strengthen a community bond between the two of us.
>
> This mom was a believer and thus *in Christ* by faith, but in this incident, when it came to her sanctification, how she did life, she was *in sports."*

As followers of Jesus we are *in Christ* (Romans 8:1) and *in the Spirit* (Rom 8:9), yet how we do life can often be shaped by being *in* something else.

2) What are you tempted to find your success, boasting, and validation in?

Study 2: Romans 8:9-14

Read Romans 8:9-14 again

3) What does being *in the Spirit* mean for our lives? Find one 'consequence' of being *in the Spirit* from each verse.

4) Knowing you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, how might you have to change the way you view or approach other areas of your life? *Specifically the one you've identified above.*

> What we are *in* shapes how we react to life … likewise, what we were *in* shaped how this mom and I viewed the coach. Because this mom was *in sports*, she saw the coach as "the enemy". He had sinned against her sports idol, and thus against the community. I wasn't happy with the coach, but because I was *in Christ*, I saw the coach as God's instrument to potentially draw Emily into Jesus. The mom was mildly upset. I was concered, waiting and praying. My location *in Jesus* shaped my response to Emily's benchwarming. It took the stress out of me. Union with Christ thrives under stress, because stress draws us more deeply into Christ. On the other hand, union with sports wilts while your daughter sits on the bench.
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> Greek stoicism, which dominated the elite culture of Paul's day, taught that suffering is good for us. It toughens you up. Paul knew that suffering matures you, but he wasn't interested in any old suffering, only in the *fellowship of Jesus's suffering.* Likewise I didn't want Emily on the bench because it was good for her. I wanted resurrection.
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> I didn't know the shape or timing of resurrection, but I knew God would hear my prayers for my daughter. God had helped me so amny times that hope had become a habit. So in the midst of a confusing situation I had clarity: I knew the story Emily and I were in (Jesus's story); I knew where she was in the story (dying); I knew the outcome (some kind of resurrection). Clarity calms the soul.

5) When stress or disappointment comes this week, what would it look like for you to pause, pray, and remember the story you are in with Jesus?

Read Romans 8:15-16

1) What is the good news for followers of Jesus?

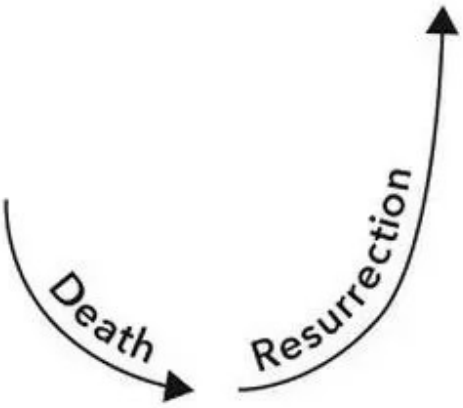
Read Romans 8:17

2) Why might verse 17 be a surprise after reading verses 15-16?

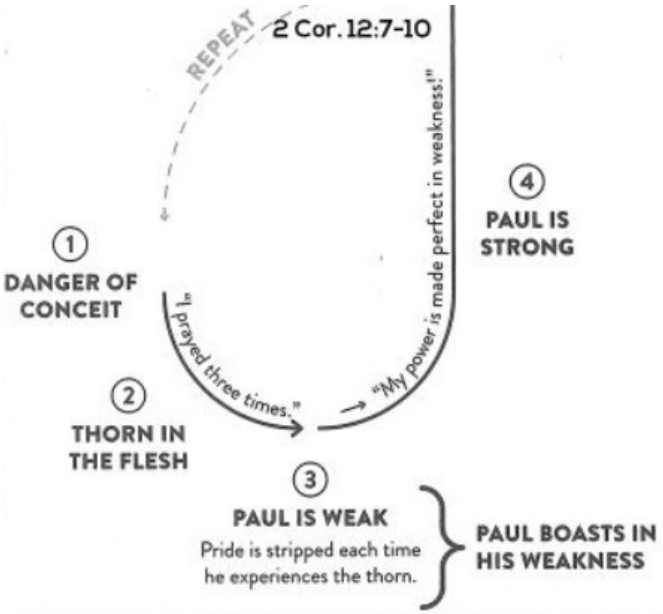
For some who think being God's children means heaven now, verse 17 can be a surprise! But the Apostle Paul makes it clear, being God's children means suffering with Jesus.

Yet this verse is also surprising because we often think of Jesus suffering *for us*. Not us suffering with him.

3) What do you think it might mean to '*share in his sufferings*'?



Here is an example of what it looked like for the Apostle Paul to share in Jesus' sufferings (from 2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Paul shared in Christ's suffering as he became more like Christ.



Another suprise is that this suffering is linked in some way to sharing in his glory, yet we know that it is only because of Jesus' suffering, not our own, that we share in his glory.

4) What is the relationship between suffering and glory? For Jesus, and for us?

Paul Miller tells the story of his friend Kayla, who volunteered to lead on a Christian Camp for people with disabilities. She used a week of her leave and paid a significant amout of money, for the privilege of serving Jesus and loving the people on the camp.

> He writes, "the trouble started on Tuesday, when Kayla was in the food line; another mom said she had overheard Kayla belittle her parenting. In the world of camp, this is a serious offence. The mother complained to the camp directors, who questioned Kayla. But Kayla had no recollection of saying anything about this mom's parenting, so there was no resolution - just a murky impasse. It wasn't long before most of the camp staff knew about this mom's concerns. It had become a big drama. Like it or not, Kayla was the centre of the problem. The camp leadership could not declare Kayla innocent or guilty. A cloud hung over her.
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> On Wednesday morning, Kayla came to us, distraught. For her, it felt as if her ministry was over. We didn't think the charges against her were true, but there was no way of proving it. Because of my immersion in a *fellowship of his sufferings*, I told her, "On Monday, you were in a transaction. It was a good transaction. You were giving your time and money, and receiving back thanks and the joy of knowing you were helping others. But now, instead of honour, you are getting dishonour. Instead of thanks, you are getting misunderstanding. You are entering the sufferings of Christ; the pattern of his life is now the pattern of your life. Now you are beginning to love and get to know Jesus in new and deeper ways. This is your glory!"

5) Is there a time when you, like Kayla, received shame or hurt for trying to love others? How did you respond?

Where suffering disorients us, sharing in Christ's suffering orients us.

Where suffering causes confusion, sharing in Christ's suffering brings a bit more clarity.

6) Knowing you are in a fellowship with Christ's sufferings, how might your response change next time?

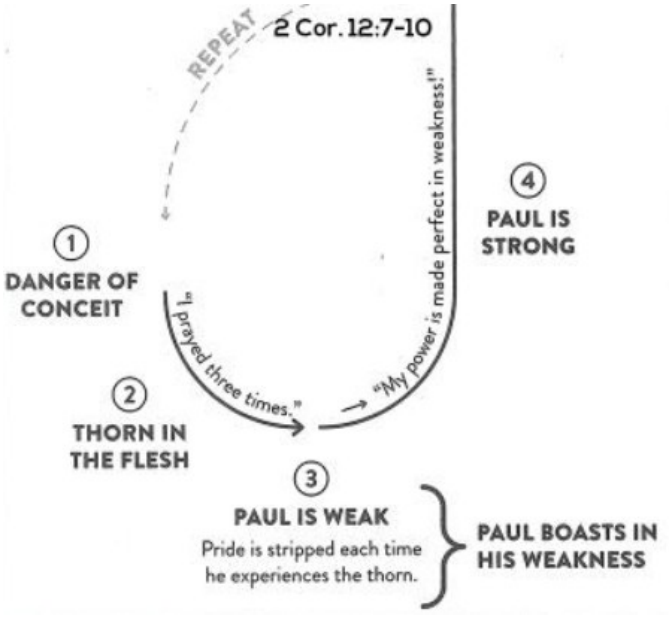
Read Romans 8:18-30

1) What is the hope for the Christian who suffers?

2) What does it mean that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him"?

We can refer to the ways God works for the good of those who love him as 'mini-resurrections'. While we await our true and glorious resurrection with God in heaven we keep our eyes open to 'mini-resurrections' as we face the 'mini-deaths' of suffering in this life - hardship, rejection, sickness, and grief.

3) What might these 'mini-resurrections', the good that God brings through suffering, look like?



Study 4: Romans 8:18-30

Our mini-resurrections may include:

Relational restoration after conflict, betrayal, or misunderstanding.
Growth in humility after the death of pride or self-sufficiency.
Joy and hope emerging after discouragement or suffering.
Spiritual maturity that develops through trials.
The flourishing of others because of our sacrificial love ("my dying is for your rising").
Fresh faith and dependence on Christ after seasons of weakness.
New opportunities or unexpected blessings that arise from apparent setbacks.

4) What mini-resurrections have you seen in your life?

5) And the life of others?

Tim Challies writes in the light of the death of his son,

“Because Romans 8:28 exists, those who love God and are loved by him can have confidence that he is working through all of life’s circumstances to bring good out of bad, light out of darkness, joy out of sorrow. It’s not that God is especially agile, a kind of cosmic PR man adept at manipulating circumstances, but rather that he is the Planner, the Engineer, the Designer who has ordained the means just as much as the end. He ordains the calm and the storm, the darkness and the dawn, the famine and the feast. This being the case, no event is meaningless, no situation purposeless, no condition ultimately hopeless. God is working out his good will not despite dark days, difficult trials, and broken hearts, but through them. Such circumstances are the raw material he uses to form and shape his good plans, his perfect purposes.

God’s specialty is not bringing good from good, but good from bad and Romans 8:28 gently tells me that if I trust him through my tears, he will give me reason to laugh; if I trust him through my pain, he will teach me to praise; if I trust him through my grief, he will afterwards show me all the good that came with it and through it. He will show me the precious flowers in the dry desert, the beautiful blooms against the sharp thorns, the gentle petals beneath the vicious skies. For behind every black cloud is a yellow sun, behind every dark night a bright day, behind every frowning providence a smiling face—the smiling face of the God who works all things for good for those who love him and are called according to his purpose.”

Pray giving thanks that we have Romans 8:28 and for the way God has worked in our lives

Study 5: Romans 8:31-39

Read Romans 8:31-39

1) What is our relationship to God the Father in this passage?

2) What is our relationship to Jesus in this passage?

Psalm 44 is an intriguing Psalm. It should be read and understood within its Old Testament context, as 'Old Covenant' theology, where the obedience of God's people to his law and covenant is linked to their peace and prosperity in the land.

3a) How does Psalm 44 show Old Covenant theology?

3b) How does Psalm 44 challenge a simplistic understanding of Old Covenant theology?

3c) What does Psalm 44 teach the original hearer about suffering?

3d) How does the New Covenant (being children of God, no condemnation) change how we understand suffering?

4) How does Romans 8 resolve the tension of Psalm 44?

5) What are the hardships we face where we might risk thinking we are separated from Christ's love?

6) How does knowing nothing can separate us from the love of Christ change how we experience that hardship?

7) When is a time in your life you have felt upheld by the love of Christ in hard times?