

God's Purpose of Grace

By John Taylor

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read the comments related to Romans 8:22-27 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: What was Paul hoping for in Romans 8:24-25? What is the true hope of the disciple of Jesus Christ?

Assignment Two

Read the comments related to Romans 8:28-30 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following question: What would someone look like who is "conformed to the image of His Son" (v. 29)?

Assignment Three

Read the comments related to Romans 8:31-39 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: What are questions Paul asks? What are the answers he expects?

Scripture to Memorize

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will better understand how through the gift of the Spirit and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God's purpose for believers is ultimately fulfilled.

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It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

People you know, once active in church, seem to be drifting away from God and abandoning their commitment to following Jesus. They cannot understand the pain and suffering they see around them, which seems to have no answer and no end. Do you:

- (a) rejoice because they must not be genuine believers, and you don't want false believers in the church?
- (b) let them drift away because, after all, they once went forward in church and God will certainly bring them back to Himself?
- (c) prayerfully and lovingly seek to draw them back to Christ and His people?

How do we help people for whom the promise of the gospel seems empty at the moment?

Read Romans 8:22-39 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 22. creation has been groaning. The world is God's good creation. At the same time, largely because of human sin, it is not yet as it should be. This world is filled with suffering and evil, but Paul pictures the creation groaning not in despair, but in longing and hope, as if waiting for childbirth. Transformation is coming.

Verse 23. we. Followers of Jesus. **firstfruits of the Spirit.** Because we have the Spirit of God, believers already experience, in anticipatory form, the blessings of the age to come. Then God will make everything perfectly as it should be. Even our bodies will be transformed at the resurrection. But we groan, like the rest of creation, because the blessings, for now, are still mixed with suffering.

Verse 24. in this hope. Our present salvation gives us a promise of final resurrection.

Verse 25. with patience. Christian perseverance in the Bible is both a promise and a command.

Verses 26-27. the Spirit. Our prayer life is the key to our enduring in faith, but in our weakness, that prayer life is often inadequate. However, the Spirit of God prays for us. **groanings too deep for words.** Literally, "unspoken groans." The Spirit shares our pain and silently groans to God. Because God knows the heart and mind of the Spirit, those prayers are heard!

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now report on the true hope of the disciple of Jesus Christ.

Discussion Question

What are some of the things in this world that cause us the most pain? What are some signs of the Spirit's presence in the lives of believers; signs that give us hope for the coming salvation?

Studying the Passage

Verse 28. And we know. If we are going to have hope and persevere in this pain-filled world, we need to know some things. For example, we need to know how the Spirit helps us through

suffering. Or how the Spirit uses everything to work together to fulfill His purpose for us.

Verses 29-30. conformed to the image of His Son. What is His purpose for us? What is His plan? What is His destiny for us? To make us like Jesus! Then there will be multitudes of people, now and in the coming resurrection, whose lives fulfill the original plan for creation. **foreknew . . . predestined . . . called . . . justified . . . glorified.** This outlines the process by which God fulfills His ultimate purpose for disciples of Jesus Christ. "Predestined," here, is not for salvation but that believers might be like Jesus.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now report on what it means to be conformed to the image of God's Son.

Studying the Passage

Verse 31. these things. This refers back to the encouragement in verses 22-30. **If God is for us.** And He is.

Verse 32. also with Him. The cross is the guarantee of God's good plans and generous purpose for us.

Verse 34. Christ Jesus. The death and resurrection of Christ deliver us from the sin which otherwise would keep us from any hope of a new creation. Not only the Spirit, but Christ Himself intercedes for us before the Father.

Verses 35-39. No persecution, suffering or opposition from any source will stop the love of God, through Christ, from being poured out forever on His people.

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now report on Paul's questions and expected answers in Romans 8:31-39.

Discussion Question

What does Romans 8:22-39 tell us about how we can be certain God's plan for us will never fail?

On Your Own

What are five things about this world, or in your world, that make you groan and long for the return of Christ? Write them in the blanks below. Then pray this prayer, modeled after Romans 8:38-39.

For I am sure that neither (1) _____, nor (2) _____, nor

(3) _____, nor (4) _____, nor (5) _____, nor anything else

in all creation, will be able to separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our

Lord.

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below, and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session I made a commitment to . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights, and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Groups of disciples always are making preparations for evangelism, missions, and service. Use these minutes to work on the next plan.

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

For many people, life seems to have no real hope, no certainty and no safety. Sin, suffering, Satan and death are active in the world. We have reasons to groan.

The early disciples in Rome had what seemed to be a fragile and often painful existence. The political and military power of the Roman Empire was dominating them. Believers suffered persecution and even in the synagogues they sometimes found opposition. The great thinkers of their society looked down on them, and the church experienced division.

Paul wrote to show the church at Rome that the gospel really does solve the problem of sin and evil for Jews and for Gentiles. And he showed them that the good plans of the gracious God who created this world will certainly come to pass.

We live in an in-between world. We live between the victory of Christ over sin, through His death and resurrection, and the final completion of God's plans for the world, when Jesus returns. We need to endure and not give up, but we do so in the strength God provides through the power of the Spirit.

Paul shows that we can be confident. The divine plan for us—that we should be formed in the image of God's Son, who is the image of God Himself—will truly be fulfilled. This is a true and unshakeable hope. Our confidence is in God Himself, not in ourselves.

Romans 8:22-39 gives several reasons for this confidence:

1. Believers' present experience of the Holy Spirit is both a foretaste and a promise of the resurrection life to come.
2. The Spirit helps us, even when we don't know what to pray, by interceding for us.
3. God is able to take all the hardships of this world and work them for our good.
4. God has foreknown us and predestined us to become like Jesus.
5. God has justified believers. He has brought them into a right standing and relationship with Him.
6. God has already given up His own Son for us. This not only overcame the power of sin; it was proof of His eternal love and grace.
7. Christ is interceding for us with the Father.
8. Nothing can separate us from God's love.

Follow up Question

What gives you hope, despite the evil and suffering in the world?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.