

SECURED

All who accept the gospel have a sure hope for a future as children of God.

ROMANS 8:12-25

MEMORY VERSE: ROMANS 8:1

- **READ** Romans 8:1-39, First Thoughts (p. 82), and Understand the Context (pp. 82–83). As you read Romans 8:12-25, note the image Paul depicts of the glorious future for God’s children.
- **STUDY** Romans 8:12-25, using Explore the Text (pp. 83–87). Complete the Bible Skill activity on page 82 for Romans 8:23. To dig deeper into the Scripture passage, use the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary*, found in print or digital format at LifeWay.com.
- **PLAN** the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 88–89), More Ideas (p. 90), and Weekly Adult Extras under the Resources tab at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible. Look for ways to further connect any guests who return from last week’s Easter session.
- **GROW** with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).
- **GATHER** the following items: Personal Study Guides; Prepared index cards for the opposites activity (p. 88); and Two prepared posters that say “Creation Restored (Romans 8:19-22)” and “Humanity Restored (Romans 8:23-25)” (p. 89). Prepare to display: **PACK ITEM 2** (*Outline of Romans*); and **PACK ITEM 5** (*Poster: Key Words in Romans*). Make copies of **PACK ITEM 13** (*Handout: Key Words in Romans*).



KEY DOCTRINE

Last Things

The unrighteous will be consigned to hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in heaven with the Lord (2 Thess. 1:7-12).

BIBLE SKILL

Dig deeper into the background and usage of key words or phrases.

Focus on the phrase “redemption of our bodies” in Romans 8:23. Compare the phrase in several trusted Bible translations. Jot down the various renderings of the term that you find. Using a Bible dictionary, review articles on our future hope. Scan passages listed and make notes of any findings that help you better understand the meaning.

FIRST THOUGHTS

When a buyer borrows money from an institution, he signs a contract. At that point, the buyer is under obligation to the lender. If he does not keep the terms of the contract, a penalty will be assessed. Unable to fulfill the law of sin and death, we were under its penalty. However, Jesus died on the cross as our sin offering, releasing us from the penalty of sin and death. Paul reminded us that we have no obligation to live according to the flesh. We are free to be guided by the Spirit.

(In PSG, p. 68) **How would you describe the emotions that come with signing a loan agreement? How does paying off a loan free you?**

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ROMANS 8:1-39

Romans 8 is one of the great chapters in the Bible. It begins with the promise that “there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus” (8:1) and ends with the promise that nothing in all of creation “will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (8:39). In this chapter Paul highlighted the role of the Holy Spirit in our sanctification and in our assurance of salvation.

The first part of the chapter focuses on the role of the law and the role of the Spirit. The law, weakened by sinful flesh, could not fulfill God’s righteous requirements. However, God sent His Son as our sin offering so that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in those who walk according to the Spirit. Paul laid out two possible ways to live: according to the flesh and according to the Spirit. Living according to the flesh sets one’s mind on the things of the flesh and results in death. Living according to the Spirit sets one’s mind on the things of the Spirit and results in life and peace. The person living according to the flesh is hostile to God and cannot please Him. The person living according to the Spirit has the Spirit living within. Only those who are children of God have the Spirit of God, and the Spirit produces life and righteousness in the believer.

Those who are led by God’s Spirit are adopted children of God, and as such, they are heirs with God and coheirs with Jesus. Our status as heirs means we share in the suffering that results from living in a world marred by sin as we wait patiently for the fulfillment of God’s salvation.

Paul provided a reminder of the role of the Holy Spirit in representing the believer before God. When we do not know what to pray, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us to the Father. When things look bleak, God works things together for our benefit, just as He works to complete our salvation.

Paul ended this chapter and this section of Romans by returning to his theme of no condemnation for those in Christ. He answered his rhetorical question, “Who can bring an accusation against God’s elect?” (v. 33), with a resounding no one. Just as there is no one who can condemn, so also there is no one who can separate us from God’s love. It is hard to imagine a chapter that more fully lays out our blessings as believers.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

ETERNAL FUTURE (ROM. 8:12-13)

VERSES 12-13

The connection between this verse and the preceding verses is very strong (**so then**). Earlier, Paul had contrasted a life lived in the flesh and a life lived in the Spirit: “Now the mind-set of the flesh is death, but the mind-set of the Spirit is life and peace” (Rom. 8:6). Because the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead lives in the believer, that Spirit will bring life to the believer (8:11). The Spirit of Christ living in believers (8:9) means **we are not obligated to the flesh**.

The Greek word translated *obligated* can refer to someone who is in debt financially or to someone who is under moral obligation. Here Paul obviously meant the latter sense. Paul used the Greek word translated *flesh* twenty-six times in the Letter to the Romans; thirteen of those are found in the first thirteen verses of this chapter. For Paul, the word “flesh” referred not just to our physical appetites but also to the entirety of life in a world that is in rebellion to God. As believers, we are under no obligation to live **according to the flesh**. Our obligation is to the Spirit of God within us.

Paul contrasted two different lifestyles, using two “if-then” sentences. **If you live according to the flesh, you are going to die.** Paul must have been talking about spiritual, eschatological death, not physical death, since physical death will be the fate of both believers and nonbelievers who are not still alive when Jesus returns. This death will involve God’s final judgment on sin and the eternal punishment that will accompany it. On the contrary, **if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.** The *deeds of the body* are those acts of the flesh that are done according to the flesh. Again, this life is not physical but spiritual and eternal life. Believers are able to put these deeds to death because of the Spirit working within them (*by the Spirit*).

(In PSG, p. 70) **What does living by the Spirit look like? How is living by the Spirit connected to living in eternity?**

VERSES 12-13

¹² So then, brothers and sisters, we are not obligated to the flesh to live according to the flesh, ¹³ because if you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

ETERNAL INHERITANCE (ROM. 8:14-18)

VERSES 14-15

¹⁴ For all those led by God's Spirit are God's sons. ¹⁵ You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father!"

VERSES 14-15

Those who are **led by God's Spirit** are able, by the Spirit, to put to death the evil deeds of the body. Such persons allow the Spirit of God to provide direction for their lives. As a shepherd guides his sheep, believers follow God's Spirit, walking not "according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (8:4). Believers who follow the leadership of God's Spirit are, in fact, children of God who have the Spirit of God. People who do not have the Spirit of Christ do not belong to God (8:9) and, as such, are not children of God. God's Spirit within the believer creates a family relationship with God and with other believers.

The family unit in Paul's day consisted of both slaves and children, but the role of the slave was much different than the role of a child. Believers have entered God's family as **sons**, not slaves who **fall back into fear**. Believers enter God's family by **adoption**. The Greek word translated *adoption* occurs only five times in the New Testament (Rom. 8:15,23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). The practice of adoption was common in the Roman society of Paul's day. Though the practice was not widespread in Jewish society of that time, Paul listed it as one of the privileges Jews received from God (Rom. 9:4). In adoption then, as now, the child was taken into the family on equal status with any other children who might already be in the family. The father exercised the same control over the adopted child as he would over any other child in the family.

Believers enjoy full status as children of God, as seen by our ability to address God as **Abba, Father!** The word *Abba* is an Aramaic word that means "father"; Aramaic was the first language of most people who lived in Palestine at that time. Some Bible teachers have suggested translating the phrase "Father, dear Father." As adopted children, believers have the right to address God as Father—a sense of intimacy that is the opposite of the fear experienced by the slave.

VERSES 16-17

¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God's children, ¹⁷ and if children, also heirs—heirs of God and coheirs with Christ—if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

VERSES 16-17

Not only does the Holy Spirit play a role in our becoming children of God (8:9), but also the same Holy Spirit plays a role in the awareness of our status as God's children. The single Greek word translated **testifies together with** is also used in Romans 9:1, where it has an intensive meaning: "my conscience testifies to me" rather than "with me." Two meanings are possible in verse 16: "the Holy Spirit testifies to our spirits that we are God's children," or "the Holy Spirit testifies together with our spirit that we are God's children." Most English translations take the second option. Paul's point is that the Holy Spirit testifies to and with us as we cry, *Abba, Father*, assuring us that we belong to Him.

Added to the blessing of being children of God, Paul pointed out that we are also **heirs of God and coheirs with Christ**. As heirs of God, believers will receive an inheritance from God. Paul described this inheritance as the world (Rom. 4:13), the kingdom (1 Cor. 15:50), and the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:7). To be a coheir with Christ was to identify with Christ in the life He lived, specifically in suffering and in glory. Paul desired to know "the

power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings” (Phil. 3:10). On his first missionary trip, after having been stoned and left for dead, Paul encouraged new believers to remain strong in their faith: “It is necessary to go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

The present suffering believers must endure pales in comparison with the *glory* yet to be *revealed*.

VERSE 18

Paul’s evaluation of his present situation was not the result of wishful thinking. The present suffering believers must endure pales in comparison with the *glory* yet to be *revealed*. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul said it this way: “For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17). While suffering never seems light while we are enduring it, the glory awaiting us is beyond our ability to comprehend.

In what ways does our position as adopted children of God affect the ways we relate to God? How does Hebrews 4:14-15 fit with our status as children of God?

CREATION RESTORED (ROM. 8:19-22)

VERSES 19-21

The suffering Paul described was not just human suffering; when Adam sinned, God cursed the ground because of Adam (Gen. 3:17). Paul pictured all of creation waiting with eager anticipation for restoration. When writing to the Philippian believers, Paul used the same Greek word to express his “eager expectation and hope” that he would not be ashamed but that Christ would be honored in his life (Phil. 1:20). On the day when God’s sons will be revealed, believers will see in God’s glory the true nature of what it means to be a child of God. The whole creation will be involved, as we wait eagerly for the curse to be reversed.

The Greek word translated *futility* in verse 20 describes a state of being that fulfills no purpose or has no use. The cause of this futility lay not in some fault in creation but in sin, which led creation to be subjected unwillingly to this futility. Creation was the victim of the sinful choices of the first couple. God’s subjection of creation to futility refers to the curse God placed on the ground in judgment for Adam’s sin (Gen 3:17-19). However, the subjection of creation to futility was not God’s final word; if it had been, there would be no hope.

Hope is possible because God will *set free* creation itself. The phrase translated *bondage to decay* describes the current state of fallen creation.

VERSE 18

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.

VERSE 19-21

¹⁹ For the creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God’s sons to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility—not willingly, but because of him who subjected it—in the hope ²¹ that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage to decay into the glorious freedom of God’s children.

The creation, enslaved to decay and corruption, will one day be set free. The goal of that freedom will be **the glorious freedom of God's children**. Paul envisioned the renewal and restoration of God's creation. Because of their sin, the very ones whom God had appointed as stewards of His glorious creation (Gen. 1:26-28) were responsible for its slavery to decay. However, God promised a new heaven and a new earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22) in which righteousness will dwell (2 Pet. 3:13).

VERSE 22

²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now.

VERSE 22

Exactly what Paul meant by the phrase **the whole creation** is not clear. Paul may have been referring to both human and nonhuman creation suffering together. In this case, Paul would have been referring to the entire world and the people who inhabit it. However, in verse 23 Paul seems to have distinguished human suffering from the suffering of God's nonhuman creation (everything created before the creation of humans). Therefore, Paul probably was referring in verse 22 to the created order of this earth—all of those things that humans were charged with overseeing (Gen. 1–2).

Paul's description of the whole creation **groaning together with labor pains** brings to mind the curse Eve received in connection to childbirth (Gen. 3:16). This suffering was going on right up to the time that Paul was writing (**until now**) and is still going on today. However, just as the result of suffering in childbirth is the birth of a new human being (John 16:21), so the suffering of creation will result in freedom from bondage to decay when the children of God are revealed in glorious freedom. The present fallen world will one day be replaced with a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1).

As believers, how should we relate to the physical world in which we live?

VERSE 23

²³ Not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the firstfruits—we also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

HUMANITY RESTORED (ROM. 8:23-25)

VERSE 23

What Paul said about creation he now applied to believers. Just as creation groans together, so we as believers **groan within ourselves**. Our bodies are susceptible to the same decay as the rest of creation. We experience hardship and suffering as the result of bodies crippled by sin and relationships too often characterized by ego and pride. However, we have **the Spirit as the firstfruits**. Just as the first crops to be harvested were a sign of the full harvest to follow, believers have the Holy Spirit as a sign of what is to come. In writing to the Ephesians, Paul made the same point with a different image. There, the Holy Spirit was described as the down payment for the believer's full inheritance to come (Eph. 1:14).

During this time of frustration and groaning, believers are **eagerly waiting for adoption**. Earlier, Paul had said believers already have the Spirit of adoption (Rom. 8:15-17). Some have tried to alleviate the tension by suggesting that at present believers have only the Spirit, not adoption itself. But in the preceding verses Paul made it abundantly clear that believers are, in fact, children of God. We live in a fallen world in which we do not yet see what we will be when Christ returns again (1 John 3:2). Here we see the already/not yet of the gospel. We are in fact adopted children of God, and the Holy Spirit is the sign that when our glorious freedom as God’s children is fully revealed, we will see Him as He really is.

In that day God will free our bodies from decay and corruption.

Paul described adoption as **the redemption of our bodies**. In that day God will free our bodies from decay and corruption. Paul could speak of redemption as something we already possess (“In him we have redemption,” Eph. 1:7) and as something we are yet to receive (“until the redemption of the possession,” Eph. 1:14).

VERSES 24-25

In verse 24 Paul returned to the concept of hope he had introduced earlier (Rom. 8:20). Hope, by its nature, is something that is not yet received: **hope that is seen is not hope**. Once we have received what we hoped for, we no longer hope. It makes no sense to hope for something you already have. Yet Paul was able to say that **in this hope we were saved** (past tense).

Although we have been saved, given the Spirit as firstfruits, and adopted into God’s family as beloved children, we still live in a fallen world, waiting for the full completion of our salvation when we receive our glorified bodies and dwell in heaven with the Lord forever. That is the unseen thing for which we hope; **we eagerly wait for it with patience**. The word translated *patience* describes the capacity to bear up under difficult circumstances. As believers, we need to approach the suffering and trials of this present life with patience as we eagerly wait for the fulfillment of our salvation.

What are some specific ways the Spirit as firstfruits helps us as we wait patiently for Jesus’ return?

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read “Adoption in the First Century,” an archived *Biblical Illustrator* article provided via digital download in the Spring 2020 *Explore the Bible Leader Pack*.

VERSES 24-25

²⁴ Now in this hope we were saved, but hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ Now if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience.

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

MATCH: In advance, write one word listed below for each opposite on an index card and prepare enough for one card per participant. Here are enough words for sixteen cards:

MALE — FEMALE HIGH — LOW BIG — SMALL TALL — SHORT
NEAR — FAR UP — DOWN YOUNG — OLD CLEAR — FOGGY

As the group arrives, give each person an index card. Ask them not to show it to anyone and wait for instructions. Once everyone has arrived and cards are distributed, instruct the group to find the person who has the opposite of their card. Once matches are made, explain: *Contrasting the differences between your two cards is one approach to describing each one. It also can be used to frame a discussion. In this session we will see how Paul contrasts opposites to explain a spiritual truth.*

TRANSITION: Point out the context of today's passage using **Pack Item 2** (*Outline of Romans*) and **Pack Item 7** (*Handout: Romans Time Line*). Use the information from Understand the Context (pp. 82–83; PSG, p. 69) to summarize what Paul covered in Romans 8.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

INTRODUCE: *Paul began Romans 8 by explaining that those who have accepted God's grace are His children. They no longer live under God's condemnation (Rom. 8:1-2). God has given His Spirit to help them live according to His desires (Rom. 8:3-4) and with confidence that He is actively working in their lives (Rom. 8:5-11).*

READ: **Instruct a volunteer to read Romans 8:12-13**, and invite the rest of the group to listen for the contrast between living according to the flesh and living by the Spirit.

DEFINE: Call attention to **Pack Item 5** (*Poster: Key Words in Romans*). Identify the word *flesh* on the poster. Then read the definition of *flesh* on **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: Key Words in Romans*). Explain: *In Romans 8:12-13, Paul declares that those who live in the flesh are going to die, but those who live by the Spirit will enjoy a much different eternal existence.*

ASK: *What does it mean to "live according to the flesh" (v. 13)? How can we know when we're living by the flesh or by the Spirit?*

GUIDE: *What titles do you hold in your family that identify relationships you have with other members? After the group has shared, ask: What rights and responsibilities go along with each of those titles?*

TRANSITION: *Just as we have responsibilities and privileges in our families, we are accountable to God for what He expects from us.*

READ: Read **Romans 8:14-18**, and instruct the group to listen for the relationship Paul identified between God and those who follow the Spirit. Lead the group to contrast the difference between “spirit of slavery” and “Spirit of adoption” in verse 15. Highlight the significance of calling out to God as “*Abba, Father!*”

DISCUSS: *What are the benefits of being children of God based on verses 16-18? (testimony of the Spirit, full membership in God’s family, glorified with Christ) If you had to describe being a child of God in one word, what would it be? What single word would you use to describe being separated from Him? (PSG, p. 72)*

TRANSITION: Prepare two posters (or create columns on a board): *Creation Restored (Romans 8:19-22)* and *Humanity Restored (Romans 8:23-25)*. Display each poster to introduce the following sections of today’s text.

READ: Display the *Creation Restored* poster, and ask: *What happened that resulted in the need for creation to be restored?* Read Genesis 1:31 followed by Genesis 3:17. Explain that creation became collateral damage as a result of humanity’s sin. **Invite a volunteer to read Romans 8:19-22.**

EXAMINE: *Where do you see the impact of sin on nature? What can you do to be a better steward of God’s creation? (PSG, p. 74)*

READ: *Paul used the imagery of childbirth to depict the restoration process. The stress and strain that marks the current situation point to an incredible new birth. This is true for creation and humanity.* Display the *Humanity Restored* poster, and **read Romans 8:23-25.**

IDENTIFY: *What are the characteristics of hope as explained by Paul in verses 24-25? (secures salvation, real but unseen, requires patience)*

DISCUSS: *How does the groaning of creation compare to our groaning for renewal? (PSG, p. 75)*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

SUMMARIZE: Read today’s memory verse (Rom. 8:1). Encourage the group to memorize the verse as a reminder of the saving act of God through Jesus Christ to which Paul referred.

CHALLENGE: Using the third set of questions under In My Context, invite the group to discuss the connection between our hope and our witness. Ask: *Discuss as a group the connection between our hope and our witness. How can you and the members of your Bible study learn to more effectively share His hope with others? (PSG, p. 76)*

PRAY: Lead in a prayer of commitment to live according to the Spirit until death or the time when creation and humanity have been restored.



PRACTICE

- Contact those present for this session, reminding them of the constant challenge of dealing with the flesh. Encourage them to faithfully take the actions they identified in their daily routines.
- Follow up with answers to questions that came up during group time that were not adequately addressed.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

As an option for Focus Attention, ask: *How would you describe the emotions that come with signing a loan agreement? How does paying off a loan free you?* (PSG, p. 68) Say: *In this session, Paul reminds us that we are free to be guided by the Spirit, assured of a glory beyond our ability to comprehend.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To introduce the text, direct the group to read Romans 8:12-25, underlining words and phrases that describe a believer's future. Ask: *Why was it so important for Paul to remind his readers of the believer's future?* (PSG, p. 69)
- To supplement Romans 8:12-13, read Titus 2:11-13. Ask: *How did Titus describe the way a believer should live?* Note that Paul included this element in his expectations for Christian living. Ask: *What does living by the Spirit look like? How is living by the Spirit connected to living in eternity?* (PSG, p. 70)
- Report on your use of the Bible Skill activity for Romans 8:23 and invite the input from those in the group who may have used the activity: *Focus on the phrase "redemption of our bodies" in Romans 8:23. Compare the phrase in several trusted Bible translations. Jot down the various renderings of the term that you find. Using a Bible dictionary, review articles on our future hope. Scan passages listed and make notes of any findings that help you better understand the meaning.* (PSG, p. 74)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Call for a volunteer to read aloud the Summary Statements under In My Context on page 76 of the PSG. Invite the group to contemplate what it means for believers to rest in the knowledge of these statements. Ask: *Which of these challenges you the most today? Explain.*

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Each stanza of "How Firm a Foundation," from John Rippon's *Selection of Hymns from the Best Authors*, is based on a biblical promise of security for the future of the children of God. Read each stanza, and invite the group to paraphrase it in contemporary language. Conclude with a prayer of thanksgiving for the salvation provided through Christ to all who believe.