



# 07

## SESSION SEVEN

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# Once Slaves, Now Children

### SESSION SUMMARY

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This session begins a new unit that examines how God changes us in Christ. By exploring Romans 8, we will touch on some of the highlights of this key theme in Scripture. Romans 8 explains how believers have undergone a radical transformation from being slaves of sin and fear to becoming children of God; children who can live with full assurance and hopeful anticipation that God will one day make all things new.

### SCRIPTURE

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Romans 8:12-39

# THE POINT

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**God delivers us from slavery to sin and death and gives us life through the Spirit.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

The Disney-Pixar movie *Up* opens with a powerful flashback sequence. In a few short scenes, we see a detailed backstory of the cranky widower, Carl. The scenes are a masterfully crafted, in many ways capturing the heart of the entire story. Many people have called this flashback sequence a masterpiece of cinematic storytelling. Essentially, it is a great movie within a great movie.

People often consider the Book of Romans as one of Paul's most significant letters to the churches, and some scholars even suggest that every major revival in church history was preceded by the faithful preaching of this letter. And right there in the middle of this letter—the Mt. Everest of theological writing—we find Romans 8. This chapter is a key component in the New Testament's description of the glory of the gospel and Christ's finished work.

In other words, Romans 8 is the movie within the movie that takes us into the panoramic view of how God's redemption story so completely changed us—from suffering to celebration, from bondage to freedom, from death to resurrection. This rich explanation of the gospel message is important for us to know and understand.

- **What are some of the ways you have been changed by the gospel? What are some ways you still want to be changed?**

### Option 2

If able, before the session, instruct students to bring in an old school portrait or family photo from childhood. Use the following list of questions for students to describe some ways they have changed since elementary school.

- **What did your hair look like in the photo/elementary school?**
- **Where did you live when this photo was taken/in elementary school?**
- **What was your favorite movie when you were a child?**
- **How has your sense of style changed since this photo was taken/elementary school?**
- **Who were your closest friends when you were a kid? Do you still spend time with those people?**

Just like big changes occur in our personalities and style as we grow up, God continues to change us, beginning the moment we trust Jesus as Savior. In Christ, we are new creations—new creations who are constantly being made into the image of our Savior.

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**God delivers us from slavery to sin and death and gives us life through the Spirit.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **Paul:** former persecutor but now follower of Christ and apostle to the Gentiles

## PLOT

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From slaves to sons, groaning to glory, death to life—we worship a glorious God whose grace is deeper than any ocean. Why would He do this for us? Why would He treat unholy rebels in such a gracious way? Paul helps us see the answer in this chapter of his letter to the Romans. It is all because our God is love.

**CO-HEIRS  
WITH CHRIST**

*Benefits of being  
adopted through Christ*

**FELLOWSHIP  
WITH BELIEVERS**

*Believers love one  
another as God has  
loved us.*

**LIFE IN THE SPIRIT**

*Works of the flesh  
versus the fruit of  
the Spirit*

## FROM SLAVES TO SONS

You may recall from a previous volume where we covered Jesus' parable that is traditionally known as the prodigal son. Basically, a man's younger son asked his father for his inheritance, which he used up on wild and shallow living. Eventually, he wound up eating pigs' food in the middle of a pig-pen, dreaming of what life might be like if he could only gather the courage to return home. If you recall, the prodigal son's first instinct was not that he could return immediately to his old life as a privileged son of a wealthy man. Instead, he reasoned, "Even my father's servants have it better than this. I can go home and work for my dad." (See Luke 15:11-32).

Imagine the son's gratitude and love for his father when he was taken back as a son, not as a servant (Luke 11:22-24). This is how we should respond when we read Romans 8:12-17, where Paul summarized the transformation we experience by the power of grace.

**<sup>12</sup> So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. <sup>13</sup> For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Rom. 8:12-17)**

- **What does it mean not to live according to the flesh? Does that mean Christians should expect never to sin? Why or why not? (p. 54, PSG)**

If we are in Christ, we are no longer slaves to the flesh. We have been freed by Christ, and the Spirit enables us to put to death any lingering works of the flesh. Christians *can* still sin, but the gospel changes us so that we don't *have* to. The chains of the flesh have been broken.

Because of this, we are also no longer slaves to something else—fear. In Christ, there is no reason to fear being rejected by God. Our ongoing struggle with the flesh will not end in us being separated from God. Why? Because the spirit of adoption has replaced the spirit of slavery. We are now God's sons and daughters.

In Paul's day, Roman adoption brought you into a new family fully, as if you had been born into it. Through adoption, a child was granted full rights, like any other child in the family; all previous relationships, obligations, and debts were ended. In essence, adoption gave people brand new, permanent identities. This is why Paul placed adoption in opposition to being a slave to the flesh; both cannot be true of believers.

Not only does this change the way we see God and our standing before Him, but it also changes the way we live as Christians. Our status doesn't mean we don't have work to do; rather, we do our work freely and joyfully knowing that our sonship is permanent and that we can neither pay back what is already satisfied nor lose what has already been divinely given. We don't live as slaves with an uncertain future, but as sons and daughters with an assured inheritance.

## FROM SUFFERING TO GLORY

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When Paul classified believers as adopted children and coheirs with Christ, he was quick to qualify that not everything we share with Christ is pleasant. We share in Christ's sufferings now as we wait for the day when we will be glorified with Him and everything will be right again as He creates all things new.

**<sup>18</sup> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. <sup>23</sup> And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. <sup>26</sup> Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. <sup>27</sup> And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. <sup>28</sup> And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Rom. 8:18-30)**

One interesting thing in this passage is that the frustrations and pains creation experiences are not the ones we'd associate with that of death. Yes, something is giving way, something is changing, but it is not giving way to death. Instead, the world is being renewed and will be remade—particularly at Christ's second coming, when He completes His kingdom and brings in the new heaven and new earth. So, the earth's frustrations and pains are not because of death, but because it is being made new.

Just as the world is frustrated and in pain, so are we. As Paul wrote about God's plan to restore fallen creation (to a state even better than Eden), he connected men and women—the crown of God's creation—to His restoration as well. We are frustrated and in pain too; we suffer, we experience trials and injustice, we sin, and we grow older. But just as a new earth will come, so will new bodies for God's children. If we have been made joint-heirs with Christ, it is because we have died with Him and live with Him. And though we will die someday, we will be resurrected.

- **What are some frustrations and pains you experience?** (p. 56, PSG)

## FROM DEATH TO LIFE

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How would you live if you realized that nothing you fear could ever have the last word in your life? What would your days look like if you believed that the most defining and secure reality of your very existence was not anything you could see?

Paul concluded the depths of the gospel he explored throughout in poetry:

**<sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup> Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." <sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:31-39)**

This was Paul's way of asking, "Well? What now? If you believe all this incredible stuff, what does it do to your heart and your life?" As Paul reflected on what the Holy Spirit prompted him to write in the prior verses, he was overcome with joyful confidence. *Yes, we still will struggle with the flesh. Yes, we will experience suffering and pain. But God is faithful and His grace is unshakable.*

## TIMELINE

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### **SPIRITUAL WARFARE**

*Standing firm with the armor of God*

### **GENEROUS LIVING**

*A model and motivation for generosity*

### **THE HALL OF FAITH**

*Examples of living by faith*

Paul described a courtroom drama unfolding to drive home the reason for his confidence. We are pictured in the defendant's seat, and God Himself is the judge behind the bench. Paul first asked who would bring an accusation against us to the Judge. The answer is no one, because God is the One who justifies and can answer any charge brought against His own. Next, Paul asked who could reach a guilty verdict and condemn? Again, the answer is no one, because Jesus paid our sentence in His death and resurrection, and He intercedes on our behalf. Finally, Paul asked who could carry out a guilty sentence and separate us from the love of Christ. Once again, the answer is no one or no thing. Even if an accusation could be brought, even if a guilty verdict could be given, there is no way we can be separated from God's love.

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Adoption (p. 55, PSG)

*Adoption into God's family is one the positive benefits of justification. We are pardoned from the judgment against us through justification and experience a change of identity—we become children of God (John 1:12; Gal. 4:5). Adoption restores our relationship with God, which was once lost through the fall. Adoption also gives believers the benefits of being heirs of God and coheirs with Christ (Rom. 8:16-17).*

## CHRIST CONNECTION

God's people are in the process of being conformed to the image of His Son. We have been adopted into His family, no longer slaves to sin but children of God. Because of Christ's work on the cross, we are welcomed into God's family and are now coheirs with Christ, eagerly awaiting the glorious future He has promised.

# YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **How does the assurance of your adoption into God's family influence the way you see yourself and live?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does it encourage you to know that Jesus is making all things new?** *Hopefully this truth will bring comfort to us now by helping us understand that Jesus is in control and is working for our good and joy. In addition, it should also encourage us to look to the future, knowing the difficulties and sorrows we experience today will one day seem small in comparison to the greatness of the glory we will see.*
- **How does God's plan for the world determine how we treat it now?** *God has always intended for us to be stewards and co-managers of creation. That plan was disrupted during humanity's fall into sin, but is restored in Christ. This is why Christians have a voice when it comes to the environment or caring for animals—our Creator gave us this responsibility and desire to reflect Him in the way we care for the creation He has placed us over.*
- **What are you particularly worried about right now in your life? How does the gospel of God's love speak to that situation or anxiety?** *Answers will vary.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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At the moment of salvation, the Holy Spirit awakened our hearts to receive Christ; He began to dwell within us and establish Christ's lordship in our lives. After that happens, we don't relate to God as slaves or servants who are trying to work off a debt. We are no longer burdened by the reality that there is nothing we can do to make up for a debt with eternal consequences. We aren't plagued with fear that we haven't done enough. Instead, we relate to God as a loving Father. We are not in debt to Him because Christ has paid the debt for us. And by His virtue, we become heirs alongside Him.

- **Why do you think so many Christians think of their relationship with God in terms of “pay back?” Is this instinct all bad? Why or why not?** *We naturally think this way, one reason being that the idea of “pay back” prevents us from realizing that we are completely incapable of saving ourselves. We don't want to be seen as beggars, but that is who we are.*
- **Why is it important for us to maintain the gospel truth that the debt of sin is paid while not lapsing into the sin of thinking we don't need to obey God at all?** *Answers will vary.*



## HEART

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Romans 8 sends up a resounding hallelujah, giving us words of worship we can use to respond to all God has accomplished without us, but also for us (vv. 31-39). In short, Paul praised because, although he was dead apart from Christ, in Christ he would be totally, eternally, and irreversibly alive.

- **How can the gospel cultivate in believers a profound humility and confidence at the same time?** *The gospel produces grace-esteem, not self-esteem. Self-esteem often leads to pride; grace-esteem recognizes that all we have is from God, while creating in us confidence because we know we are adopted children of God.*
- **By ending this passage with poetic verse, Paul reflected how “life in Christ” is understood as worship. How does thinking about our daily lives this way transform our view of the Christian life?** *Answers will vary.*



## HANDS

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The key to living through anything we experience in life is to keep our focus on what is in store. We are beloved children of God, waiting for the completion of God's irreversible promises to us. This is our motivation to live purposefully for the gospel, through the power of the gospel. This is the joyful news we have to share. This is why we patiently endure suffering and life's difficulties, not with a plastic grin, but with genuine peace, joy, and confidence because this world is temporary.

- **How should Christians' view of difficulties differ from the unbeliever's view?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some current difficulties in your life that you can face by focusing on Jesus and His love for you?** *Answers will vary.*

## ► ADDITIONAL INFO

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### **LEADER PACK**

For this session, refer students to pack item #12, which contains an informational poster on the Book of Romans.

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPSPR18Letters](http://lifeway.com/TGPSPR18Letters))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

**[GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)**

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

**[MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject)**