Romans: Extreme Makeover of the Soul

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Romans

Why read this book?
If you've ever struggled to express what it means to follow Christ, Romans can give you the right words to say. It offers one of the clearest expressions of Christian belief, covering major issues—faith and works, law and grace—in lively, practical terms. But be prepared! Reading this book has been a turning point for many. It helped Martin Luther to discover that faith alone justifies—bringing about the Reformation. Luther's comments on Romans later caused John Wesley's heart to be "strangely warmed," sparking another revival. If you desire spiritual renewal, read Romans as a good starting point.

Who wrote this book?
The apostle Paul, who wrote about the grace of God both from experience (Acts 9:1–19) and education (Acts 22:3).

Why was it written?
Paul wrote: (1) To introduce himself to the believers in Rome and enlist their help in spreading the gospel. (2) To develop and defend the truth of the gospel he had been preaching. (3) To encourage the Roman believers to rely solely on God's grace for their salvation (3:24).

When and to whom was it written?
Romans was probably written in A.D. 57 to believers—most of them Gentile—in the capital city of the Roman empire.

What to look for in Romans:
Watch for the major themes of faith, grace, righteousness, and justification. You'll find the foundation—vital teaching on faith—in the first eleven chapters. Then, in the last five chapters, you'll discover practical implications of faith—how the teaching works out in everyday life.

From the Quest Study Bible (Zondervan)
LEADER’S GUIDE

Justification: A Clean Slate
Christ clears the way for a new life built on hope.

God wants to make us into new people. He knows we need an extreme
makeover of the soul, something we cannot do on our own. The Book of
Romans, chapters 5–8, explains three Bible terms: justification,
sanctification, and glorification. This study will look at justification and how
it can change our lives. Our extreme makeover begins when God justifies us
through faith in Jesus Christ. That justification fills us with hope by freeing us
from our past, securing our future, and initiating God’s transforming work in
our lives.

Scripture:
Romans 5:1–11

Based on:
The series builder Extreme Makeover: Soul Edition by Bryan Wilkerson
PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

For many years John Cox and his wife, Wendy, did their best to provide a home for themselves and their three daughters. He was an itinerant youth minister, and she was a nurse. At times they both worked to get ahead financially, and then for a time Wendy would stay home to care for the girls. They shopped in thrift stores and reclaimed furniture from dumpsters and the sidewalk. After years of renting, a new job gave them the opportunity to buy a house of their own, to provide some stability and build some equity for the future. The only house they could afford was a run-down fixer-upper in suburban L.A. It was hardly a dream house. It was so unusual, and painted such a strange shade of blue, that the neighbors called it “the Smurf house.” About the only thing the house had going for it was the address. It was located on Hope Street.

As it turned out, the house needed even more work than they had originally anticipated. The pipes were rusted and leaking, and toxic black mold was growing in the walls. John and Wendy didn’t have the time, skill, or money to make the repairs that the house so desperately needed. The family joked that the only way they’d get their dream house was for some rich guy to come along and fix it all up for them.

And that’s exactly what happened. One day, the Cox family awoke to the sound of a bullhorn blaring, “Good morning, Cox family!” It was Ty Pennington and the crew of Extreme Makeover: Home Edition, who had shown up to work their magic on the Cox’s dilapidated house. Each week Ty and his crew of experts select a needy, deserving family like the Coxes, kick them out of their house for a week, move in with their tools and trades, and transform the family house into a place of beauty, functionality, and joy. For families that are struggling with health issues, physical disabilities, grief, and financial strain, EMHE provides more than just a new home. They get a new lease on life, a fresh start, an opportunity to move beyond their hurts and hardships and begin to realize their dreams.

And that’s exactly what it meant for the Cox family. On the seventh day, what the show calls “Reveal Day,” the family returned to find their ugly, decrepit, toxic house transformed into a place of promise and possibility. They squealed and giggled and cried with delight. Someone had done for them what they could never have done for themselves. Truly, they were living on Hope Street.

What Ty Pennington and his crew did for the Cox family is something like what God wants to do in your life. He wants to transform you from the inside out. He wants to make you over into the person he created you to be, the person that deep in your heart you have always longed to be.

Discussion starters:

If the EMHE crew were to show up on your front lawn tomorrow, you would waste no time in putting them to work on some home-improvement project you have dreamed of. Suppose an equally talented crew was to show up on the doorstep of your soul; what would you want them to work on? Name specific changes.
PART 2
Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Justification fills us with hope by freeing us from our past.

Read Romans 5:1–2. This passage begins with the word therefore. A basic rule of Bible interpretation is that whenever you come to a therefore, you ask what it is there for. The therefore means that these verses only make sense in light of what has already been said in the first four chapters of this book. Most scholars agree that this passage marks a transition in the book of Romans, as Paul moves from the subject of justification in chapters 1–4 to sanctification in chapters 6–8.

The Book of Romans reads like a textbook of systematic theology. You may feel about these verses the way you feel about the features of a new computer. You can read the words, but they don’t mean much to you. But as technical as it sounds, the Book of Romans was simply a letter written by the apostle Paul to the church in Rome. Paul had not yet been to Rome, but he hoped to go there someday, and he wrote this letter to introduce himself and his message, the gospel.

But as it turns out, that gospel begins with some bad news. The bad news is that we are all sinners. Read Romans 3:22–23. When we say people are sinful, we’re not saying that they are as bad as they can possibly be. We’re saying that every part of their being has been infected by this virus, this tendency to do the wrong thing instead of the right thing, to be self-centered rather than other-centered, to do things our way instead of God’s way. When Paul said we “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” he described an arrow that missed its mark and fell short of the target, which is God’s glory. We were created in the image of God to glorify God in a unique way—by our temperament, by our relationships, by our physical, intellectual, and creative abilities.

We’re all infected with sin, and it creates all kinds of problems for us. It separates us from God, one another, and our true selves. Ultimately, that separation leads to death—physical and spiritual death. That’s bad news.

But halfway through chapter 3, Paul announced good news. The good news is that God in his love has found a way to forgive those sins and to restore us to a relationship with him. That forgiveness is made possible through Jesus Christ, who became one of us, lived a sinless life, then died on the cross to suffer the consequence of sin. It was a substitutionary death; he died in our place, so that we could be released from the penalty of sin.

If we continue reading that pivotal passage in Romans 3, picking it up again at verse 23, we read, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” There’s our Bible term—justification. Justification is the act of God whereby he declares righteous the penitent sinner who turns to Christ. Even though we are guilty, God declares us not guilty and makes us right with him on the basis of Christ’s sinless life and substitutionary death.

That brings us to chapter 5, where Paul summed up all the good things that have come into our lives as a result of justification. First of all, verse 1 tells us we have peace with God. We’re no longer God’s enemies; we have become his friends.
Secondly, we have access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. In other words, we’re no longer in trouble with God, living in fear of his judgment, but instead enjoy his favor every day.

Thirdly, we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Instead of falling short of the mark time and time again, we’re now on our way to reaching that mark, glorifying God by becoming the person God created us to be in the first place.

In other words, we’ve been given a house on Hope Street. Now that we’ve been justified, we are free from the penalty of sin. We don’t have to live in fear anymore, wondering when our sin is going to catch up with us and ruin everything. We are free now to move beyond that sin, to become a new person. No matter what we’ve done, no matter how many times or ways we have fallen short of God’s glory, no matter how many foolish tendencies and hurtful habits we have picked up along the way, they’re all forgiven, forgotten, as if none of it ever happened in the first place. In fact, that’s how you can remember what it means to be justified—it’s “just as if I’d never sinned.”

That’s the scandal of the gospel: that guilty people go free, that sinners are forgiven, that rebels are treated like long-lost friends. Romans 5:8 tells us, “when we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Justice was done at the cross, so that God might be just and the justifier of the person who puts their faith in Jesus.

That’s justification: the act of God whereby he declares righteous the penitent sinner who turns in faith to Christ. If you’ve done that, then God has nothing against you. No record of your wrongs. He’s got no file on you, no permanent record of your failures.

Do you see how important that is to becoming the person God created you to be? You’re free! You don’t have to go through life looking over your shoulder, wondering when your past is going to catch up with you. You don’t have to carry around that load of guilt and regret. You’re free to leave the past behind and set your sights on becoming the person God created you to be. That’s what Paul is talking about in verse 3 when he says, “we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.”

**Q** According to what we just talked about, how would you define the word justification?

**Q** Does justification seem fair to you? Why or why not?

**Q** How does being justified in Christ give you hope?

**Q** Romans 5:1 says that justification gives us peace with God. How does it do that?

**Q** What does it mean that we now stand in grace (v. 2)?

**Q** What does it mean to “hope in the glory of God” (v. 2)?
Which of the following statements do you think agrees with Romans 5?

- I am justified before God because of the good things I do.
- I am justified before God because he doesn’t really care about my sin.
- I am justified before God because of Christ’s sacrifice for me.
- I am not justified before God because of my sin.

Support your statement through Romans 5:1–11. Explain what’s wrong with the other statements.

Optional Activity

**Purpose:** To help us realize that Christ offers hope to all of us.

**Activity:** Read the following case studies and ask the group to advise each one according to Romans 5.

- Sasha believes that if she lives a good enough life, God will accept her. Therefore she goes to church every Sunday, practices as many good deeds as she can, and tries not to sin.
- Christopher figures God is loving and accepting. He doesn’t worry about his sin, because he’s sure God will overlook it. As a result he just lives life the way he wants.
- Brenda beats herself up all the time over her sin. She feels like a worm and can’t believe God would love her.

**Teaching point two:** Justification fills us with hope by initiating God’s transforming work in our lives.

That hope marks the beginning of God’s transforming work in your life. Once you’ve dealt with your past, you can look to the future. God has moved you to Hope Street. The extreme makeover has begun. There’s plenty of work to be done, and it’s going to take more than seven days, but it’s underway. He won’t quit until you’ve become the glorious person he intended you to be.

Read Romans 5:3–4. Justification doesn’t just free us from the past. It also secures our future and assures us that God is at work in our lives every day, even when it’s hard and painful, because God is committed to the transformation of our souls.

Think of it this way. Let’s say you’re a college freshman. On the first day of class you show up in Biology 101. The professor begins by announcing to the class, “This may be the hardest class you’ve ever taken. The material’s going to be tougher than anything you had to learn in high school. You’re going to have to work harder than you’ve ever had to work before. In fact, this course is going to be so difficult that many of you are not going to make it. I’m fully expecting half of you to flunk out.” You swallow hard and head out the door to your second class, Civilization 101.
The professor announces to the class. “This may well be the hardest class you’ve ever taken in your life. The material’s going to be tougher than anything you had to learn in high school. You’re going to have to work harder than you’ve ever worked before. But I promise, if you’ll just stick with me, I’ll get you through it. You’ll not only pass the course, you’ll get a B or better. I guarantee it.” Which of those two classes are you going to be most excited about? Which of those two teachers will make a lasting mark on your life?

Jesus never promised that the transformation of your soul would be quick and easy. It’s going to take a lifetime, and it’s going to hurt sometimes. But if you stick with him, if you let him do his work, you will someday become the glorious person he created you to be, the person you have always wanted to be. What Extreme Makeover: Home Edition calls “reveal day,” the Bible calls glorification. The process of getting there is sanctification. But the makeover begins with justification, by which God forgives your past, guarantees your future, and begins making you a new person from the inside out.

**Q** According to Romans 5:3–4, why could Paul rejoice in his suffering?

**Q** How is verse 5 like the professor in our illustration who promised success?

**Q** What is the key thing God gives us that guarantees our success (v. 5)?

*Learner's Note: His love, which is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.*

**Q** Read Romans 5:8. How does this reassure you of God’s love for you? How does that love motivate you?

### PART 3

**Apply Your Findings**

Some of you have never experienced justification. You’re still living on Despair Drive. You’re still trying to make a go of it on Self-Help Avenue. Give it up, already. Make the move to Hope Street. Turn to God in repentance and faith; let him forgive you and set you on the path to eternal life.

If you’ve already done that, if you’ve already been justified, then start living like it. Let go of the past. Look forward to the future. Throw open the doors of your life to the God who makes everything new. Let the Lord move into your life and start making all things new. Maybe you’ve made the move to Hope Street already but forgotten what hope looks and feels like. You’re still beating yourself up for past mistakes, still stuck in old ways of thinking and feeling. Don’t lose hope. The Triune God is ready to work wonders in your life—the providential hand of the Father, the unconditional love of Christ, and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

Let the Lord set you up in a house on Hope Street. What Ty Pennington and his crew do for people’s houses, the Lord wants to do in your life—transform you from the inside out. The Triune God is a crew unto himself: the Heavenly Father, whose sovereign hands superintend your circumstances; Jesus Christ the Son, whose sacrificial love conquers your sin; and the Holy Spirit, whose empowering presence gives you courage and grace to daily live a new life.
**Action Point:** Ask each person to determine where they are in this process: Do you need to accept Christ’s justification on your behalf, even if you don’t deserve it? Or have you accepted his justification but lost hope in ever changing? Let’s take time to mention which one you need to do and pray for each other right now to take the first step.

—Study by F. Bryan Wilkerson, with JoHannah Reardon
God wants to make us into new people. He knows we need an extreme makeover of the soul, something we cannot do on our own. The Book of Romans, chapters 5–8, explains three Bible terms: justification, sanctification, and glorification. This study will look at justification and how it can change our lives. Our extreme makeover begins when God justifies us through faith in Jesus Christ. That justification fills us with hope by freeing us from our past, securing our future, and initiating God’s transforming work in our lives.

Scripture:
Romans 5:1–11

Based on:
The series builder Extreme Makeover: Soul Edition by Bryan Wilkerson
PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Each week Ty Pennington and the crew of *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* select a needy, deserving family, kick them out of their house for a week, move in with their tools and trades, and transform the family house into a place of beauty, functionality, and joy. For families that are struggling with health issues, physical disabilities, grief, and financial strain, EMHE provides more than just a new home. They get a new lease on life, a fresh start, an opportunity to move beyond their hurts and hardships and begin to realize their dreams.

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PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Justification fills us with hope by freeing us from our past.

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—Study by F. Bryan Wilkerson, with JoHannah Reardon
Justification is a one-time act, but sanctification is a daily decision and a lifelong journey. In justification, God declares you to be a righteous person. In sanctification, God develops you into a righteous person. The great news is that it is his work, not just ours. He gives us his Holy Spirit to guide and empower us through each step of growth. This study will explore how he does that.

Scripture:
Romans 6:1–14

Based on:
The series builder Extreme Makeover: Soul Edition by Bryan Wilkerson
PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant’s Guide included at the end of this study.

The TV makeover craze began a few years ago with a couple of shows that promised to transform ordinary-looking people into beauty queens and chick-magnets. A team of specialists—cosmetic surgeons and dentists, beauticians, personal trainers, and life-coaches—were assigned to a person who desperately wanted a new look. The candidates spent months in seclusion, undergoing a series of transformational procedures: nips and tucks, teeth veneers, shopping sprees, beauty treatments, and workout routines. They weren’t just hoping for a new look; they were hoping for new lives: hoping to rejuvenate their marriage or social life, get a leg up professionally, improve their health, gain confidence and self-respect. They wanted to become new people, better people, the kind of people they had always dreamed of being.

But what would they look and feel like six months later? Would their love life really improve, or would they suddenly find themselves dissatisfied with the person they were dating or married to? Would they feel comfortable in their new skin, or would they and their loved ones long for their old, comfortable selves? It’s one thing to get a new look. It’s another thing to become a new person.

The makeover shows are popular because we all long to be better than we are—not just physically, but emotionally, relationally, and spiritually. We’re painfully aware of our imperfections and failures. When we blow up at someone at work, hurt someone we love, waste time or money on something foolish, insist on having our own way, watch something we wish we hadn’t, and think things about people that we know aren’t right—we hate those things about ourselves. We want to be better than that. We know God created us for better than that.

Those of us who follow Christ wish we could be more like him in our daily activities and interactions. It takes more than a nip and tuck to become a new person; it won’t happen with a few months of coaching and workouts. Real change has to happen from the inside out, over a period of many years, and it must be the work of a wise, gracious, and powerful God.

The Book of Romans reveals the process by which God makes us new people from the inside out. The makeover begins when God justifies us through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. When we turn to Christ in repentance and faith, God forgives our sin, secures our future, and moves into our lives to begin fashioning us into the glorious men and women he created us to be.

But justification is just the beginning. It’s wonderful to be forgiven, to get a fresh start, a clean slate—“Just as if we’d never sinned.” But what’s to keep us from slipping back into old ways, making the same old mistakes we’ve always made? What can God do to truly transform us into the kind of people he had in mind when he created us, the kind of people we have always dreamed of being?

That’s what sanctification, the second Bible term in our series, is all about. Sanctification is defined as “the gracious and continuous operation of the Holy Spirit by which he delivers the justified sinner from the pollution of sin, renews his nature in the image of God, and enables him to perform good works.” Justification is an act, but sanctification is a process. Justification is a moment-in-time transaction. Sanctification is a lifelong journey. In justification, God
declares you to be a righteous person. In sanctification, God develops you into a righteous person.

Discussion starters:

[Q] When you first made a decision to follow Christ, did you see a lot of changes in your life? If so, what?

[Q] Have you had any disappointments in your Christian life—anything you wanted to see change but didn’t? Why do you think that was the case?

PART 2
Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Sanctification begins with dying to sin and coming alive to God.

In the Book of Romans, Paul introduced himself and his gospel to the Christians in Rome. He spent chapters 3, 4, and 5 explaining justification and all its benefits—peace with God, hope that does not disappoint, joy in suffering, and eternal glory. Like all good communicators, Paul anticipated his readers’ next question. Read Romans 6:1.

In other words, if we’re already promised forgiveness for our sins, and if every time we’re forgiven it reveals God’s grace, why don’t we just keep on sinning, so that his grace is even more evident? Many of Paul’s critics attacked him on this very point, arguing that his gospel of grace would encourage people to sin more.

People today raise the same objection to evangelical Christianity. They say it’s presumptuous and arrogant to assure people that their sins will be forgiven simply through faith in Christ. Not only that, they say, it’s dangerous. If you tell people that, they will throw off all restraint and sin more than ever. Is that where this gospel leads?

Read Romans 6:2. The actual phrase Paul uses is strong: “God forbid!” “May it never be!” “No way!” He reminds us, “We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?”

Read Romans 6:3–14. Paul reminded his readers of their baptism. That was the commonly accepted mark of conversion in the early church, the recognized way of identifying yourself as a follower of Jesus Christ. Remember, he says, how you went under the water, as if you were being buried? You died that day. You died to your sinful nature, to that innate tendency to do the wrong thing, to serve your own needs and desires, to ignore or resist God.

When you become a Christ follower, it’s not just that God comes along to give you a helping hand at being a better person. Something dramatic happens; a death takes place on the inside.

When Paul says, “We died to sin,” he’s not saying that the sinful nature passed away and is no longer active in our lives. That tendency will be with us as long as we are on this earth. What he’s saying is that the sinful nature no longer has control over us: we died to it, and when you die to something it can no longer control you. Dead men don’t sin!
So it is when we are sanctified: we die to sin’s control over us, and God raises us to life with a new nature. Just as justification sets us free from the penalty of sin, sanctification sets us free from the power of sin. The sinful nature is still with us, and will be until we are glorified, but we don’t have to obey it anymore. This is an essential truth if you are to become a new person. It means you are free not to sin. You don’t have to live the old way anymore. When someone loses their temper with you at work, you don’t have to lose your temper with them. You’re free to remain calm, because God has put a new nature inside you. When someone hurts or betrays you, you don’t have to strike back, give in to bitterness, or plot revenge. You’re free to forgive them, knowing justice is in God’s hands. When someone offers a juicy piece of information about someone, you don’t have to pass it on. You can stop it right there, because you don’t need to feel superior to anyone else, or prove your worth with inside information about someone. When that pornographic ad pops up on your screen, you don’t have to click on it, because you’re free to celebrate your sexuality in better ways.

The point is that once you die to sin, you are no longer under its control. You don’t have to return to old habits. You don’t have to surrender to the same old desires and temptations.

[Q] What do you think the new life God wants for us would look like (v. 4)?

[Q] According to Romans 6:6–7, what do you think it means that our “old self was crucified”?

[Q] In what ways are you still a slave to sin?

[Q] Why would thinking of ourselves as dead to sin help us conquer it?

[Q] Which statement best represents the truth in Romans 6:6–7?

- I have been crucified with Christ; therefore I will never sin again.
- I have been crucified with Christ; therefore sin has no hold on me.
- I have been crucified with Christ; therefore I no longer need him to conquer sin.

Why did you choose the statement you did? Explain it according to Romans 6:6–7.

Leader’s Note: Only the middle statement lines up with this passage. The first one is unrealistic. Obviously, we sin again. The last one is arrogant and a recipe for failure. We desperately need Christ on a daily basis to conquer our sin.

[Q] What does it mean to come alive to God? What will change about us?

Teaching point two: Sanctification is accomplished through understanding, deciding, and choosing.

You have died to sin. Recognize that this transaction has taken place and remind yourself of it on a regular basis. That’s why the doctrine of sanctification is so important. It’s wonderful to be justified, to be declared “not guilty,” and to be given a fresh start, a clean slate. But if that was all God did for us, we would be doomed to make a mess of things all over again. If he only freed us from the penalty of sin, we’d still be slaves to lust, pride, greed, selfishness, and anger.
We need to understand that we have been set free from the power of sin. Sin can tempt us, but it can’t control us. We can be new and better people. Remind yourself of that every morning—*I’m free to be the person God wants me to be.* Remind yourself of that every time you have the opportunity to do something wrong, stupid, selfish or hurtful. You don’t have to use that four-letter word. You don’t have to have a nicer car than the people next door to prove your worth. You don’t need a drink to calm you down or to loosen you up. You don’t have to give yourself away sexually to feel loved and valuable. You don’t have to bend the truth to close a deal.

Simply by having that conversation with yourself at a critical moment, you will find yourself free to walk away from all kinds of temptations. Understand that you died to sin.

Secondly, decide that sin will not control you. Reread Romans 6:12. Remember that *therefore* means he’s building on something he already said. It’s not enough just to understand that you’ve been set free; you have to decide that you’re ready to live a different kind of life. An emancipated slave is free legally but may not be experientially. You have to come to a moment of decision when you intentionally turn your back on sin and determine to walk in newness of life. The church fathers called this “the mortification of sin,” putting sin to death. Sometimes we need to die to sin in general, a change of lifestyle. Sometimes you need to die to one sin in particular.

One man tells this story: “As a young man, I wrestled with lustful thoughts and temptations. Sometimes I would find myself leafing through pornographic magazines at newsstands and in drugstores. ‘It’s just a few quick looks,’ I told myself, ‘no big deal.’ Then one day, for the first time, I crossed a line. I bought a magazine and took it home. For a couple of days it was all I could think about. I was ashamed of my failure and terrified of the hold it had over me. I knew I had to turn my back on it once and for all. I threw it in the fireplace and watched it go up in smoke, telling myself and God I would never stoop that low again. And with his help, for these many years, I haven’t.”

Sometimes the Lord brings us to a moment of decision about some sinful habit, relationship, or attitude, and we need to burn it or bury it, once and for all. It doesn’t mean you’ll never struggle with that thing again, but it becomes a declaration of independence from that sin.

Understand. Decide. The third principle is to choose, moment by moment, to live for God. Reread Romans 6:13. Every day, a hundred times a day, you have the choice to serve sin or to serve God—with every part of your being. Take your hands, for instance. You can use them to hit somebody or to pat them on the back. You can use them to steal something or to do an honest day’s work. You can use your eyes to lust after people or things or to appreciate the beauty of the people and the world around you. With your mouth you can curse and demean or bless and encourage. With your mind you can obsess over negative, hurtful, gloomy thoughts or pursue truth, knowledge, and wisdom. With your whole self, and every part of yourself, you can serve sin—or you can serve God, who created you and destined you for eternal glory. It’s your choice.

**[Q]** How can you keep sin from reigning in your mortal body (v. 12)?

**[Q]** Why would it help to offer the parts of our body to God (v. 13)?

**[Q]** How does being under grace instead of the law help us to conquer sin (v. 14)?
Leader’s Note: We are motivated by God’s kindness, love, and goodness, rather than a list of rules. Think of the difference between working for a boss who simply lays down the law, and one who has your loyalty because he is good, kind, and loving.

Optional Activity

Purpose: To help us recognize how to combat sin.

Activity: Provide each person with a secular magazine or newspaper. Ask them to find an ad or an article that represents a sinful behavior. Ask each person to explain how that person could practically conquer that sin through Christ.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

A New York Times reporter named Nicholas Kristof was doing a story on prostitution in Southeast Asia. He met a couple of young Cambodian women who’d been sold into slavery. He was so moved by their plight that he purchased their freedom from the brothel for several hundred dollars. But one of the young women didn’t want to leave without her cell phone, which she wanted Kristof to buy from the owner for $55 more. When Kristof told her to forget about it, she ran back to the brothel and locked herself in her room, refusing to leave without her cell phone. The other women pleaded with her to be reasonable, to grab this opportunity while it was still available, but crying hysterically, she refused to leave. Finally, the reporter bought back the phone as well and took the woman away. But he feared for her future: “I have purchased freedom for two human beings, so they can return to their families and village. But will emancipation help them? Or will they, like so many others who have been rescued, find freedom so unsettling that they slink back into slavery once again?”

In the same way, God has purchased our emancipation. By the death and resurrection of his Son, he has freed us from the penalty and power of sin. We really can become new people, the people we have always wanted to be, but only if we choose to be free. Only by deliberate, daily decisions can we leave behind the brothel of sin and walk in newness of life.

Action Point: Provide each person with a pen and paper. Ask them to write one thing on the paper that they would like to change about themselves. Like the man who put the pornographic magazine in the fire, ask each person to commit that area to God. Then rip the paper into shreds and throw it away as a symbol of renouncing that sin. Pray together as a group for continued victory over that area.

—Study by F. Bryan Wilkerson, with JoHannah Reardon
Sanctification: A Daily Choice
God’s work of sanctification is a process of daily decisions.

Justification is a one-time act, but sanctification is a daily decision and a lifelong journey. In justification, God declares you to be a righteous person. In sanctification, God develops you into a righteous person. The great news is that it is his work, not just ours. He gives us his Holy Spirit to guide and empower us through each step of growth. This study will explore how he does that.

Scripture:
Romans 6:1–14

Based on:
The series builder Extreme Makeover: Soul Edition by Bryan Wilkerson
PART 1
Identify the Current Issue

The Book of Romans reveals the process by which God makes us new people from the inside out. The makeover begins when God justifies us through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. When we turn to Christ in repentance and faith, God forgives our sin, secures our future, and moves into our lives to begin fashioning us into the glorious men and women he created us to be.

But justification is just the beginning. It’s wonderful to be forgiven, to get a fresh start, a clean slate—“Just as if we’d never sinned.” But what’s to keep us from slipping back into old ways, making the same old mistakes we’ve always made? What can God do to truly transform us into the kind of people he had in mind when he created us, the kind of people we have always dreamed of being? That’s what sanctification is all about.

PART 2
Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Sanctification begins with dying to sin and coming alive to God.

Which statement best represents the truth in Romans 6:6–7?

- I have been crucified with Christ; therefore I will never sin again.
- I have been crucified with Christ; therefore sin has no hold on me.
- I have been crucified with Christ; therefore I no longer need him to conquer sin.

Why did you choose the statement you did? Explain it according to Romans 6:6–7.

Teaching point two: Sanctification is accomplished through understanding, deciding, and choosing.

PART 3
Apply Your Findings

God has purchased our emancipation. By the death and resurrection of his Son, he has freed us from the penalty and power of sin. We really can become new people, the people we have always wanted to be, but only if we choose to be free. Only by deliberate, daily decisions can we leave behind the brothel of sin and walk in newness of life.

—Study by F. Bryan Wilkerson, with JoHannah Reardon
God wants to transform everything about you, from the inside out. He wants to transform you from the person you are to the person he created you to be. The triune God is a team in himself: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each member of the Godhead plays a distinctive role in your transformation. This study will focus on the work of the Holy Spirit.

**Scripture:**
Romans 8:1–17

**Based on:**
The series builder *Extreme Makeover: Soul Edition* by Bryan Wilkerson
PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant’s Guide included at the end of this study.

You know, I really don’t understand myself sometimes. I want to do what’s right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate. I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my conscience tells me that I’d be better off doing it God’s way. But I can’t help myself, because there’s something inside me making me do these evil things.

I guess there’s no doubt about the fact that I’ve still got that sinful nature inside me. Because no matter which way I turn, I can’t make myself do right. I want to, but I can’t. When I want to do the right thing, I don’t. And when I try not to do the wrong thing, I do it anyway. But if I’m doing what I don’t want to do, am I really the one doing it, or is it sin living within me that’s doing it?

It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I know in my mind that following God’s law is the best way to live. But there’s another law at work within me that wages war in my mind. This other law always seems to win, so I give in to the same old things over and over again.

Man, what is wrong with me? Who will free me from this rotten way I’m living?

Anybody know that person? If you said, “the apostle Paul,” you’re right. Those are his words, right out of Romans chapter 7. If you said, “I don’t know who spoke those words, but it sounds a lot like me,” you’d be right too. I doubt there’s a Christ follower in this room who hasn’t said to him or herself, What’s wrong with me?

Here we are—we’ve become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. We’ve been forgiven for our sins, we’ve been set free to live a new life, but we keep on doing the same old foolish, hurtful things.

We should know better. We do know better. We don’t want to lie or lust or covet, but we do. We don’t want to fight with our parents or yell at our kids, but we do. We feel lousy every time we waste hours in front of the TV or the computer, but we do it anyway. We want to share our faith, but we don’t. We tell ourselves we’re going to start reading our Bibles and praying more, but we don’t.

We thought we’d be further along by now, thought we’d have left behind some of those bad habits and attitudes. But doggone it, they’re still with us, still dragging us down.

What’s wrong with us? What’s it gonna take for us to become the people we want to be? It’s going to take some outside help. More accurately, it’s going to take some inside help. It’s going to require the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit may be the least understood member of the Godhead, but the truth is that without the Holy Spirit we would all be doomed to the kind of double-mindedness and frustration that Paul expressed in Romans 7, which makes Romans 8 one of the most important chapters in the whole Bible.
Discussion starters:

[Q] Can you identify with the apostle Paul’s frustration with his own behavior as he described it in Romans 7?

Optional Activity

Purpose: To help us identify the ways we are stuck in the Christian life.

Activity: On a whiteboard or poster board, list the ways each member of your group feels stuck. This may be a besetting sin they cannot overcome, a habit they cannot establish, or a course of action they have not had the courage to pursue. After these are listed, ask the group to mention reasons why a person might get stuck in these areas, and how they think a person could move forward.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We cannot sustain permanent change in our lives.

Read Romans 8:1–4. There’s that word, therefore, again. Paul wanted us to understand that he’s building an argument, that we need to keep in mind everything he’s said up to this point. So he begins with a quick review.

He reminds us that we’ve been justified through faith in Jesus Christ (v. 1). Even though we have all fallen short of the glory for which God created us, God is prepared to forgive us on the basis of Christ’s work on the cross. If we turn to God in repentance and faith, admitting our sinfulness and believing that Christ died in our place, God will declare us righteous, just as if we’d never sinned. That’s justification—the act of God by which he declares us righteous through our faith in Christ. Justification frees us from the penalty of sin. No condemnation in this life or the life to come—that’s good news.

The second truth he reminds us of is sanctification, the process by which God sets us free from the power of sin so that we truly can become the people he created and desires us to be (v. 2).

Sanctification means we are free not to sin. Even though we still have that shortsighted, self-centered, self-destructive nature within us, we aren’t slaves to it any more. Our baptism teaches us that we died to sin, so it is no longer our master. We not only died to sin, but we were raised to new life by the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. We have been given a new nature. We don’t have to sin anymore. That’s good news.

The bad news is that the old nature is still with us—and will be—as long as we walk this earth. So we continue to struggle with sin. We continue to make foolish choices, to do the things we don’t want to do, to hurt the people who mean the most to us. That nature is so strong we can’t overcome it in our own strength. That’s why we need some outside help. That’s why we need that third member of the makeover team, God the Holy Spirit, who Paul introduces in verse 4.

So far in the Book of Romans, God the Father and God the Son have been the key players in this extreme makeover. God the Father began the transformation by sending his Son in the likeness of human beings to live a sinless life and to die on the cross for the sins of the world. God the
Son did his part by showing us how to live, and then by paying the penalty of sin for us. But for the makeover to be complete, for us to actually become new people and live new lives, we need God the Holy Spirit.

The problem with the makeover shows is that after the renovation work is done, the team leaves. The person or family that has experienced the transformation is left to themselves. What happens when the botox wears off, the cellulite returns, and the wardrobe goes out of style? What happens when a rowdy, reckless family moves back in to a freshly painted, newly furnished home? It’s only a matter of time before they make a mess of things again. Not so with the extreme makeover of the soul, because after the renovation work is done, God the Holy Spirit moves into our lives to stay.

**[Q]** According to Romans 8:1–2, why are we no longer condemned for our sin?

**[Q]** Why can’t we just follow the rules of what is right (v. 3)?

**[Q]** What do you think it means that we do not “live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit” (v. 4)?

**Teaching point two: Only the Holy Spirit can produce true change.**

In chapter 8 of Romans, the Holy Spirit takes center stage; he’s mentioned 21 times in this one chapter. Paul explains why the work of the Spirit is so important. Read Romans 8:5–8.

In these verses we learn what happens to people who try to live life on their own, apart from God. They inevitably fall short of God’s glory. They can’t help it, no matter how hard they try to be good. They will always come up short, because the sinful, human nature inevitably wins out. That sinful nature leads us in one direction—death: physical death, separation from one another, and spiritual death, separation from God.

As pessimistic as that sounds, we know it to be true. History and experience tell us that while human beings sometimes get it right and do some wonderful things, inevitably our sinful, destructive nature catches up with us and ruins everything.

Think of the 20th century—two world wars, Tiananmen Square, apartheid in South Africa, the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, the Rwandan genocide, the Chernobyl disaster. There were some bright spots of heroism or compassion in each of these stories, but overall they are about sin and death—corrupt politicians, horrific violence, deep-seated hatred, human incompetence, brutal oppression, broken promises, suppression of truth, miscarriage of justice. Here were the best minds in human history, the most powerful nations on earth, remarkable displays of individual courage and sacrifice, and yet in every case sin and death seemed to have the upper hand, and still do.

What’s true on a global scale is no less true on the personal level. Left to ourselves, our best efforts and intentions inevitably lead to disappointment, heartache, frustration, and eventually death. We all need an extreme makeover—not a facelift or some home improvements, but a deep-down lifelong renovation of our souls. That’s the work of the Holy Spirit.

**[Q]** According to verse 5, what do our minds have to do with our behavior?
In what ways can we let our sinful nature control us?

Why is the sinful mind hostile to God (v. 7)?

How can we let the Holy Spirit control our minds (v. 6)?

Teaching point three: The Holy Spirit gives life.

Read Romans 8:9–11. Often you’ll hear people say that everybody has some of the divine nature within them; that each of us needs to tap into the “god within us.” That sounds wonderful, but it’s not true, according to the Bible. It is true that we have all been created in the image of God, with the capacity for relationship with him and for eternal glory. But the only people who have God within them are the ones who’ve asked him to dwell in them. If you have not invited Christ into your life, then the Spirit of God does not live within you.

The good news is that when we do invite Christ into our lives, the Holy Spirit moves in to stay. Theologians call this the “indwelling of the Holy Spirit.” It’s true for every believer, and it’s true from the moment you open your heart to the love and forgiveness of Christ. You don’t need a second work of grace to receive the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is with you from the moment of your conversion, and it is the work of the Holy Spirit to allow Christ to live his life in and through you.

You cannot live the Christian life in your own strength. You can only do it in Christ’s strength. The secret to living the Christian life is not trying harder to live like Jesus. It is allowing Jesus Christ to live his life through you.

You may be familiar with the WWJD bracelets—reminding us to ask ourselves in every situation, “What would Jesus do?” That’s certainly a good thing to do. The problem is that when we can figure out what Jesus would do, we often don’t have the strength to do it. We usually know what Jesus would do—Jesus would forgive, Jesus would tell the truth, Jesus would put others’ needs ahead of his own. We just find it hard to do those things. Sure, we can grit our teeth, try harder, and occasionally get it right. But day after day, over the long haul, we just can’t pull it off. That sinful nature rears its ugly head and gets the best of us, as Paul himself admitted. Our only hope is to stop trying so hard and simply allow Christ to live his life through us, by yielding to the work of the Holy Spirit.

According to Romans 8:9, how can you know whether or not the Holy Spirit is living in you?

What does it mean in verse 10 that our body is dead but our spirit is alive?

What does it mean to you that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead lives in you?

Teaching point four: The Holy Spirit works when we yield to him.

John Ortberg suggests that living by the power of the Holy Spirit instead of our own power is like the difference between rowing a boat and sailing a boat. In a rowboat, you provide the power. With practice, you can get pretty good at rowing, and with training you can build up
your strength to row quite a distance. But sooner or later your muscles give out, and you’re
dead in the water. In a sailboat, the wind provides the power; all you have to do is catch it. If
you know how to do that, even the slightest breeze can get you moving, and when the wind
picks up, you can really fly across the water.

Some people live the Christian life like they’re rowing a boat. They do it all in their own
strength—pushing and pulling, straining their muscles, gritting their teeth. It’s not a lot of fun,
and it’s only a matter of time before their strength gives out and they drift off course.

But for those who understand the Spirit, living the Christian life is like sailing a boat. The Spirit
provides the power that gets us from one place to another. That doesn’t mean we’re passive. A
sailor has to read the wind, set the sails, and man the tiller. But it’s the wind that provides the
power.

It’s not surprising that the word for spirit in the Greek language, pneuma, is also the word for
wind. It’s not surprising that when the Spirit fell on the believers on the day of Pentecost, the
sound and feel of it was like a mighty, rushing wind. It’s not surprising that when Nicodemus
came to Jesus, asking for life in all its fullness, Jesus told him he would have to be carried there
by the wind of God’s Spirit.

Living the Christian life isn’t a matter of trying, but yielding, setting the sails of your life to
catch the wind of God’s Spirit.

That’s what Paul invites us to do in this final paragraph. Read Romans 8:12–14.

[Q] If our obligation is not to our sinful nature (v. 12), what is it to?

[Q] How can we “put to death the misdeeds of the body” (v. 13)?

Optional Activity

Purpose: To help us learn how to let the Holy Spirit work in our lives.

Activity: Read the following case studies and ask the group how each one could let the Holy
Spirit control their lives.

➢ Carla has been addicted to internet pornography for years now. She keeps saying
she will stop, but she never does.

➢ Kyle has wanted to learn God’s Word better. He keeps vowing he will read it
everyday, but his best efforts only last a week or so.

➢ George believes God has called him to missions, but every year he puts it off. He
can’t seem to make the leap.

Teaching point five: The Holy Spirit’s work awaits us.

Get acquainted with the Spirit. A good sailor learns to read the wind, to discern its strength and
direction, to anticipate its shifting patterns. So Paul said in verse 5: “Those who live
in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.” Most of us are
unfamiliar with the nature and work of the Spirit, so spend some time getting to know the
Spirit. Study some of the key passages in the Scriptures that speak about the Spirit (John 14, 15, and 16; Acts 2; Romans 8; Galatians 5; 1 Corinthians 2 and 12). Spend some time working through those passages. Make note of all the activities of the Spirit. Do some reading on the subject of the Spirit’s ministry. It’s hard to ride the wind if you don’t know where it comes from or where it blows. Get acquainted with the Spirit.

Second, invite the Spirit’s activity in your life. If you’re a follower of Christ, the Holy Spirit lives within you. You don’t have to invite him in again and again. But the interesting thing about the Holy Spirit is that he doesn’t force himself on anybody; he doesn’t barge in where he’s not welcome. Look again at verse 14. The word Paul uses there doesn’t imply the use of force. The Holy Spirit won’t drag us or drive us against our will. We don’t become automatons, controlled by some alien force. His Spirit bears witness with our spirits, comes alongside us. It’s important that we intentionally, deliberately invite the Spirit’s activity in our lives.

Some people do that at the beginning of each day. Chuck Swindoll writes:

> Many a morning I begin my day by sitting on the side of the bed and saying, “This is your day, Lord. I want to be at your disposal. I have no idea what these next 24 hours will contain. But before I begin, before I sip my first cup of coffee, and even before I get dressed, I want you to know that from this moment on throughout this day, I’m yours, Lord. Help me to lean on you, to draw strength from you, and to have you fill my mind and my thoughts. Take control of my senses so that I am literally filled with your presence and power. I want to be your tool, your vessel today. I can’t make it happen. And so I’m asking, Lord, fill me with your Spirit today.”

You don’t have to use those words in particular, but you get the idea. Pray it at the side of your bed or on your way to work. Invite the Spirit’s work in your life as you rest or travel.

Get acquainted with the Spirit. Invite the Spirit’s activity in your life. Thirdly, yield to the Holy Spirit in critical moments. Look again at verse 13. When that porno ad pops up on your computer screen, when someone at work lets you have it, when the kids are pushing you beyond your limits, you can grit your teeth and try hard to do what Jesus would do. Or, you can quietly, sincerely, and deliberately allow the Holy Spirit to fill your sails and take you in the direction he wants you to go. When that critical moment comes, when a choice, opportunity, or temptation presents itself, yield to the Spirit’s prompting, and you’ll find strength you never knew you had to resist temptation and to choose what is good, right, and true.

**[Q]** According to Romans 8:15, why are we released from fear? What difference does it make that God is our Father?

**[Q]** Verse 17 says that if we share in Christ’s suffering, we will share in his glory. How might letting the Holy Spirit lead our lives lead us into suffering? Why would we want to do that?

**PART 3**

Apply Your Findings

Have you been attempting to live the Christian life in your own strength or in the Spirit’s power? Sanctification begins when we die to sin and its control over us, but we’ll never become
the people we are capable of becoming without the help of the Holy Spirit. The secret of living the Christian life isn’t trying harder; it’s yielding more, setting the sails of our lives to catch the wind of God’s Holy Spirit.

**Action Point:** Ask each person to identify which teaching point he or she most needs to apply. Have them share it with the group. Pray for each other to be able to apply it this week.

—Study by F. Bryan Wilkerson, with JoHannah Reardon
God wants to transform everything about you, from the inside out. He wants to transform you from the person you are to the person he created you to be. The triune God is a team in himself: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each member of the Godhead plays a distinctive role in your transformation. This study will focus on the work of the Holy Spirit.

**Scripture:**
Romans 8:1–17

**Based on:**
The series builder *Extreme Makeover: Soul Edition* by Bryan Wilkerson
PART 1
Identify the Current Issue

What’s wrong with us? What’s it gonna take for us to become the people we want to be? It’s going to take some outside help. More accurately, it’s going to take some inside help. It’s going to require the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit may be the least understood member of the Godhead, but the truth is that without the Holy Spirit we would all be doomed to the kind of double-mindedness and frustration that Paul expressed in Romans 7, which makes Romans 8 one of the most important chapters in the whole Bible.

PART 2
Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We cannot sustain permanent change in our lives.

Teaching point two: Only the Holy Spirit can produce true change.

Teaching point three: The Holy Spirit gives life.

Teaching point four: The Holy Spirit works when we yield to him.

Teaching point five: The Holy Spirit’s work awaits us.

PART 3
Apply Your Findings

Have you been attempting to live the Christian life in your own strength or in the Spirit’s power? Sanctification begins when we die to sin and its control over us, but we’ll never become the people we are capable of becoming without the help of the Holy Spirit. The secret of living the Christian life isn’t trying harder; it’s yielding more, setting the sails of our lives to catch the wind of God’s Holy Spirit.

—Study by F. Bryan Wilkerson, with JoHannah Reardon

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Have you ever wondered what kind of person you would be if you lived up to your potential? Have you ever wondered what God had in mind when he made you in the first place? Have you ever wondered if this makeover God is working in your life is really worth all the pain and heartache? Let’s take a peek into the future, to the greatest reveal of all, and see what God has in store for men and women who experience an extreme makeover of the soul.

Scripture:
Romans 8:18–31

Based on:
The series builder Extreme Makeover: Soul Edition by Bryan Wilkerson
PART 1
Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant’s Guide included at the end of this study.

It’s the most dramatic moment in any makeover show. It’s the reason the participants endure months of surgery, workouts, coaching, and separation from family and friends. It’s the reason viewers sit through 58 minutes of interviews, narration, procedures, and commercials. It’s “the great reveal”—the moment when the person gets to see the results of their makeover.

On the show called The Swan, the contestant is brought to center stage, with her back to the audience, facing a large curtain. At the appropriate moment, the curtain is drawn, and she finds herself standing before a full-length mirror, seeing herself transformed for the first time. Typically there is a moment of speechlessness, followed by shouts of delight and tears of relief. The audience oohs and aahs and bursts into applause. Then the friends and family are brought in, and it happens all over again. They can hardly believe their eyes. They step back and stare, wide-eyed. They know it’s their loved one—but she looks more beautiful, more radiant than she’s ever been before.

It’s a glorious moment for the person, for the makeover crew, and even for the viewers—a bright and shining moment that reveals the beauty hidden inside an ordinary person, that showcases the skill and artistry of the makeover team, that causes each viewer to wonder what they could become with the help of an extreme makeover. Whatever pain and anguish the man or woman has endured, it is quickly forgotten, as they begin to ponder the possibilities of their new life and look.

Christians can look forward to a much better “great reveal,” when we finally and fully become a new person, transformed from the inside out. So far we have considered two Bible terms: justification and sanctification. Justification is the act of God by which he declares us righteous through our faith in Jesus Christ. That act of justification frees us from the penalty of sin—no condemnation in this life or the life to come. The second word we considered was sanctification, the process by which God develops us into the righteous people he has declared us to be. It means dying to our sinful nature and rising to a new way of life, filled with the Spirit. Sanctification frees us from the power of sin. This study considers a third word theologians like to use, glorification. Glorification is the culmination of God’s redemptive work, by which he frees us from the presence of sin to become the people he created us to be.

Discussion starters:

[Q] What similarities do you see between these makeover shows and the transformation that happens to us when we reach heaven?

[Q] In what ways is the great reveal that we will experience when we get to heaven so much better than the great reveal on makeover reality shows?
PART 2
Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Our glory will outweigh our suffering.

Read Romans 8:18–31. Notice that this passage begins and ends with glory. Paul mentions it in verses 18 and 30, so we know that it is a unit of thought, and that glory is the central theme.

The dictionary tells us that glory is great honor, praise, or distinction accorded by common consent. In other words, glory involves doing or being something great and having other people recognize and applaud that greatness. We might say glory is “greatness on display.”

Glory is the baseball team coming back from three games down to win the World Series. Glory is the blaze of fall foliage on an October morning. Glory is a child’s artwork hung up on the refrigerator for everyone to see. Glory is a student walking across the platform to receive her diploma. Glory is a man and woman on their wedding day, in all their finery, declaring their love in the company of family and friends. Glory is that same man and woman 50 years later, surrounded by generations of loved ones, toasting the love they have shared for so many years.

In other words, glory is someone or something at its very best, seen and celebrated by others. And glory is what God promises for all those who turn to him in faith; glory is the endgame of his eternal purposes.

But the road to glory leads through suffering, as Paul reminds us in Romans 8:17. There’s no glory without struggle. A World Series victory is more glorious after years of falling short. October is so glorious because March is so miserable. A golden anniversary is glorious because it marks five decades of loving each other through sickness and health, prosperity and adversity, better and worse.

So we shouldn’t be surprised that our glorification is preceded by suffering. Some of that suffering we bring on ourselves. By our sin and foolishness we get ourselves in trouble: we ruin our health and sabotage our relationships. Some of that suffering is inflicted on us by others: abuse, neglect, betrayal, abandonment. Some suffering is simply the result of a fallen world: disease, accidents, natural disasters. Some suffering is instigated by Satan, our enemy, who sows seeds of guilt, despair, anxiety, and fear. And some suffering is sent by God to discipline or develop us for some greater purpose.

We could spend a long time discussing the whys and wherefores of suffering, but that’s not Paul’s purpose here. He is simply being a realist. He had suffered. His readers were suffering. Anyone who attempts to follow Christ through this world will suffer. But Paul was confident that God’s purposes would prevail, that the transformation would be completed, and that he and we would become all that God intended (Romans 8:18).

In the Greek language, the word for glory literally means weight or heaviness. C. S. Lewis plays off it in the title of his famous essay, “The Weight of Glory.” Glory is heavy; it has substance. Picture an old-fashioned scale, or balance, with glory on one side and suffering on the other. Glory is heavy, so let’s imagine it represented by a bowling ball—16 pounds of whatever a bowling ball is made of. And on the other side is suffering, represented by … BB’s, those little pellets you shoot from an air rifle. Now a BB weighs something; it’s made of metal. A BB can sting if you get hit with one, especially in an exposed and vulnerable place, or if you get hit with a lot of them all at once. But BB’s will never tip the balance when there’s a bowling ball on the
other side. You could fill that tray with BB’s, and the bowling ball wouldn’t budge. The weight of glory is so great that no amount of suffering can overcome it. In 2 Corinthians 4, Paul puts it this way: “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”

So no matter what life throws our way, no matter how painful and pervasive suffering may be, we can look to the future with confidence, knowing that the glory to come will be worth it all. This passage brims with confidence, hope, and eager expectation, even in the face of hardship, famine, nakedness, and the sword.

What do we have to look forward to that’s so compelling, so glorious, that it outweighs any hardship or suffering we can experience in this life?

How does suffering make the end result of glory so much better?

Which of the following statements do you think agrees with Romans 8:17?

- I suffer so that I can earn a place in heaven.
- I suffer because Christ wants me to experience what he experienced.
- I suffer so that I can know Christ better.
- I suffer because I live in a fallen world.

Explain why you chose the statement you did.

Teaching point two: We will live in a glorious world.

Reread Romans 8:19–21. There are many beautiful and wonderful things about this world. But let’s face it, this world is not as wonderful as it could be and doesn’t always work the way it should work. The world as God originally created it was good, but when man and woman tumbled head over heels into sin, all of creation fell with them. And ever since that time, the world has not worked as it was meant to work. Rivers overflow their banks, destroying homes and fields. Tectonic plates shift beneath the surface of the earth, causing earthquakes and tsunamis. Germs and viruses run rampant. Blistering heat and killing cold render many places on earth uninhabitable. And human beings have only made things worse: acid rain, global warming, endangered species. The world is not getting more and more hospitable, but in fact less and less conducive to life as we know it.

But the Bible tells us that someday the God who created this world will re-create it, liberate it from its bondage to decay so that it becomes the glorious place he meant it to be in the first place. This world has never lived up to its potential as a home for human beings in community with God, but someday it will. Read Isaiah 11:6–9 and Revelation 22:1–5.

You and I, as children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, will live in that new world. And no amount of suffering and hardship in this life can compare with the glory of the life to come. So we look to the future with confidence, knowing that we will live in a glorious world.

What is great about the world as we know it? What is disappointing about this world?
[Q] Where did you get your ideas about heaven? Are you excited about going there? Why or why not?

[Q] What are some things Jesus told us about heaven?

Optional Activity

**Purpose:** To help us grasp a little bit of how great heaven will be.

**Activity:** On a whiteboard or poster board, list all the ideas the group can think of concerning what heaven will be like. After the list is completed, ask them where they got their ideas. Discuss which ones seem valid according to Scripture and which are mere speculation. Also discuss if any of them seem wrong in light of Scripture.

Teaching point three: We will be glorious people.

Reread Romans 8:22–23. The earth isn’t the only thing that’s in bondage to decay. The same thing is true for human beings. It’s not just our bodies that disappoint us but our souls as well. The good we want to do, we don’t do. The wrong things we don’t want to do, we do anyway. We groan inwardly every time we do this. Even though we’ve been justified, freed from the penalty of sin, even though we’re being sanctified, freed from the power of sin, we still sin. We still mess up. We still fall short of the glory for which we were created.

But it will not always be so. Someday, Paul tells us, when our makeover is completed, we will live up to our potential as human beings. Physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually we will be whole, complete, mature, fully ourselves, and fully alive. So we press on in this life, even when it’s painful and difficult, knowing that someday we will be the glorious people God created us to be.

Paul compares it to giving birth (v. 22). Giving birth is not fun. It can be excruciatingly painful and agonizingly slow. At times it seems that it will never be over. But does any mother, when that newborn is placed on her chest, say to herself, “I’m not sure it was worth it”?

So we shouldn’t be surprised when it hurts to be human, when it takes so long to be transformed. We’re being born, again. It can be painful and slow. But someday, the process will be complete. We will experience the redemption of our bodies, the liberation of our souls.

Reread Romans 8:28–30. Someday you will look like Jesus. You won’t be a clone. You’ll still be you. But you will reflect and radiate the glory of Christ in a way no other human being can. In the same way that every painting by an artist reveals something of that artist’s vision and talent, every human being is uniquely designed to reveal something of the character and beauty of Christ. The events and circumstances of your life are like paint on a palette. God is working with them, all of them, to create a Christ-like masterpiece of your life.

[Q] If you have given birth, further explain Paul’s analogy. How is giving birth similar to our lives on earth warping into our lives in heaven?

[Q] How might your life reflect the beauty of Christ when you let him transform you? Give practical examples that you’ve seen in other people’s lives.
Looking at Romans 8:30, how much of your transformation depends on you?

**Leader’s Note:** God is the one doing the work in our lives. Our part might be revealed in Romans 8:31 when Paul asks what our response will be.

**Teaching point four: We will spend eternity with a glorious God.**

Read Romans 8:38–39. Certainly, we enjoy God’s presence now because his Holy Spirit lives within us. But that’s only the preview, the promise, of what is to come. Let’s face it—there are times in this life when God feels near to us, and seasons when it seems he’s nowhere to be found. But it won’t always be that way. Someday, we will be with the Lord personally, with no sin to get in the way. Read 1 Corinthians 13:12. Our fleeting, shadowy experiences with God in this life cannot compare with the glory of being in his presence forever.

Can you think of any circumstances that fall outside of the things that Paul listed in Romans 8:38–39?

In what ways is Christ’s love more powerful than any difficulty we might face?

In light of this verse, how should we be praying for ourselves and others?

**Leader’s Note:** We should be praying that we don’t lose perspective about his love for us instead of simply praying that our circumstances will change.

**PART 3**

**Apply Your Findings**

Have you been justified, freed from the penalty of sin through repentance and faith? If not, that’s where your makeover needs to begin, by admitting your need for forgiveness and accepting Christ’s death on the cross as the payment for your sins.

Are you being sanctified, leaving your old life behind and filling your sails with the wind of God’s Spirit? If not, then don’t waste another day trying to make yourself a better person. Let the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit move into your life and transform you from the inside out.

Will you be glorified? Are you confident that your present suffering and hardship cannot compare with the good things God has in store? If not, then trust God to work with whatever is happening in your life, knowing that someday you will be a glorious person, living in a glorious world, in the presence of a glorious God.

C. S. Lewis wrote:

At the present, we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of the morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendours we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumour that it will not always be so. Someday, God willing, we shall get in.
And that, Lewis says, will be glory. When heaven and earth will be one, when redeemed men and women will radiate the beauty of Christ, when God himself will be among us, and we shall see him just as he is.

**Action Point:** Divide the group into pairs. Using Romans 8:37–39 as a model, pray for each other to truly understand this truth.

—Study by F. Bryan Wilkerson, with JoHannah Reardon
Have you ever wondered what kind of person you would be if you lived up to your potential? Have you ever wondered what God had in mind when he made you in the first place? Have you ever wondered if this makeover God is working in your life is really worth all the pain and heartache? Let’s take a peek into the future, to the greatest reveal of all, and see what God has in store for men and women who experience an extreme makeover of the soul.

Scripture:
Romans 8:18–31

Based on:
The series builder *Extreme Makeover: Soul Edition* by Bryan Wilkerson
PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Christians can look forward to a “great reveal,” when we finally and fully become a new person, transformed from the inside out. So far we have considered two Bible terms: justification and sanctification. Justification is the act of God by which he declares us righteous through our faith in Jesus Christ. That act of justification frees us from the penalty of sin—no condemnation in this life or the life to come. The second word we considered was sanctification, the process by which God develops us into the righteous people he has declared us to be. It means dying to our sinful nature and rising to a new way of life, filled with the Spirit. Sanctification frees us from the power of sin. This study considers a third word theologians like to use, glorification. Glorification is the culmination of God’s redemptive work, by which he frees us from the presence of sin to become the people he created us to be.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Our glory will outweigh our suffering.

[Q] Which of the following statements do you think agrees with Romans 8:17?

- I suffer so that I can earn a place in heaven.
- I suffer because Christ wants me to experience what he experienced.
- I suffer so that I can know Christ better.
- I suffer because I live in a fallen world.

Teaching point two: We will live in a glorious world.

Teaching point three: We will be glorious people.

Teaching point four: We will spend eternity with a glorious God.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

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