

## FREEDOM FOR THE FUTURE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Romans 8:18–30

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Romans 8:18–30

### ROMANS 8:18–30

**<sup>18</sup> I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. <sup>19</sup> For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.**

**<sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. <sup>23</sup> Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.**

**<sup>26</sup> In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. <sup>27</sup> And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.**

**<sup>28</sup> And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. <sup>30</sup> And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.**



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## KEY TEXT

*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.—Romans 8:18*

# GOD FREES AND REDEEMS

## Unit 3: Liberating Letters

### LESSONS 9–13

## LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List ways in which the Holy Spirit is active in the lives of believers.
2. Give an example from Scripture where the Holy Spirit interceded for believers.
3. Write a prayer to thank God for his presence during a difficult time.

## LESSON OUTLINE

### Introduction

A. Against the Odds

B. Lesson Context

I. Present Sufferings (Romans 8:18–25)

A. Glory to Be Revealed (v. 18)

*Pain and Reward*

B. Great Expectations (vv. 19–25)

*Adoption*

II. Present God (Romans 8:26–30)

A. The Spirit's Help (vv. 26–27)

B. The Supreme Plan (vv. 28–30)

### Conclusion

A. Hope for the Future

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

## HOW TO SAY IT

Augustus     *Aw-gus-tus.*

Caesar     *See-zer.*

Gaius Octavius     *Gay-us Ok-tey-vee-uhs.*

Julius     *Joo-lee-us.*

Michelangelo	Mahy-kuhl- <i>an</i> -juh-loh.
Raphael	<i>Raf</i> -ee-uhl or Rah-fahy- <i>el</i> .
Tiberius	Tie- <i>beer</i> -ee-us.

## Introduction

### A. Against the Odds

*Voyager 1* entered interstellar space on August 25, 2012. Scientists estimate, based on its performance, that the space probe will continue operating and gathering information until 2025. When it runs out of power, *Voyager 1* will drift off into deep space, losing momentum every second until it comes to rest somewhere among the stars.

Included in *Voyager 1*'s payload is a gold-plated audiovisual disc with pictures, audio recordings, and scientific data. Although the odds against encountering intelligent life in deep space are overwhelmingly low, this record was considered important enough to be included. As Carl Sagan said, "The spacecraft will be encountered and the record played only if there are advanced spacefaring civilizations in interstellar space. But the launching of this bottle into the cosmic ocean says something very hopeful about life on this planet."

In the midst of suffering, the hope of restoration and glory can feel as miniscule as the odds of *Voyager 1* encountering intelligent alien life. What gives us confidence in hope? Our text today gives us the answer.

### B. Lesson Context

The apostle Paul was involved in several important mission trips, the last of which was his trip to Rome for a hearing before the emperor. The book of Acts ends with Paul awaiting this trial ([Acts 28:30–31](#)). Rome was a destination he had desired for many years ([Romans 1:13](#)), but not necessarily in the status of prisoner!

The letter to the Romans includes Paul's understanding of the Old Testament background for the Christian message, the nature of Christian salvation based on the atoning death of Christ, the centrality of faith as the only path for human salvation, the relationship between Christians of Jewish and Gentile backgrounds in the plan of God, and several other matters.

All this makes Romans both the most challenging of Paul's letters to understand and the richest depository of what he calls "my gospel" ([Romans 2:16; 16:25](#)). The basis and reality of being justified by faith is the subject of [Romans 1–4](#) in general and [3:24, 28](#) in particular. Paul quoted [Habakkuk 2:4](#) in [Romans 1:17](#) to set the tone for the entire book: "the righteous will live by faith."



This means that faith—complete trust in Jesus—is the only way that eternal life may be found. It cannot be earned by obedience, although obedience is important. It is not inherited by ancestry, although this is not unimportant (see [Romans 3:1–2](#); [9:4–5](#)). True life, eternal life, the life of salvation, is only found in trusting God to save us through his Son.

Abraham, the great patriarch of the Jews, was justified by faith ([Romans 4:3](#), quoting [Genesis 15:6](#)). Thus the idea of faith in God as the core element of one’s life is not a Christian innovation. Such faith is to be the foundation of our relationship with God. This was intended as central in the pre-Israel period (Abraham), in the nation of Israel itself (Habakkuk), and now is so in the church.

In [Romans 5–8](#), Paul lays out the implications of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Through Christ, the reign of sin and death has been overthrown by righteousness and grace ([Romans 5:21](#)). With the reign of sin and death defeated, believers are free. New life in Christ also means freedom from bondage to the law ([7:1–6](#)).

[Romans 8](#) brings these various elements to a climactic resolution. There is “now no condemnation” for those “in Christ Jesus” ([Romans 8:1](#)). What the law failed to do, God himself has done through Jesus ([8:3](#)). Righteous living is enabled by the Holy Spirit, who dwells in those who have faith in Christ ([8:9–10](#)).

All these wonderful truths, however, raise a painful question: Why do suffering and death still wreak havoc? Paul indicated the likelihood that Christians would suffer for Christ’s sake. Paul encouraged the Roman believers to keep the big picture in mind: we are “heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ” ([Romans 8:17](#), not in our printed text).

## I. Present Sufferings

([ROMANS 8:18–25](#))

### A. Glory to Be Revealed (v. 18)

**18. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.**

Paul was trained by the respected Jewish teacher Gamaliel ([Acts 5:34](#); [22:3](#)). So for Paul to *consider* was for him to draw on both his faith in Christ and his vast knowledge of Scripture. His thoughts are not to be taken lightly.

Paul was careful to put *our present sufferings*—whatever their causes—in proper perspective. Jesus’ resurrection initiated a new era of salvation and restoration (see [lesson 9](#)). Because God’s faithfulness to his salvation promise has been revealed ([Hebrews 1:1–3](#)), suffering of any kind pales in comparison to *the glory that will be revealed in us*. Forms of the word *glory* occur here and in [Romans 8:21](#), [30](#) (see below), further defining what believers have to anticipate.

The path of suffering ends with being glorified with Christ and with all who have traveled the same path.

*What Do You Think?*

How do you find a faithful balance in dealing with current challenges without losing sight of hope?

*Digging Deeper*

What barriers prevent you from maintaining this balanced approach to the present and future?

### ***PAIN AND REWARD***

The Sistine Chapel nearly defeated Michelangelo (1475–1564). Between 1508 and 1512, the man who considered himself a sculptor faced the frustrating difficulties of painting the Sistine’s ceiling. He fought with the pope on concepts, overcame physical challenges in scaffolding, fussed with his helpers, and spent agonizing hours on his back with brush and paint. Throughout the period, Michelangelo carried on personal feuds with painter Raphael and inventor Leonardo da Vinci. But Michelangelo persevered. The result is considered one of the greatest works of art in all the world.



Visual for [Lesson 10](#). Direct learners' attention to this visual while considering the discussion questions associated with [verse 18](#).

Michelangelo's years of agony led to triumphal ecstasy. Paul's decades of toil and tribulation would lead to a glorious reward from his Lord Jesus. We, too, deal with pain. This may come from our faith commitments or simply from our life's circumstances. But Paul promises a future in which sufferings will give way to glory with our Lord. Are you paralyzed by personal pain, or encouraged by future reward?

—M. K.

### **B. Great Expectations (vv. 19–25)**

**19. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.**

*Creation* includes anything and everything God has made (see [Romans 8:22](#), below; compare its use in [8:39](#) [not in our printed text]; [Colossians 1:15](#); [Revelation 3:14](#)). Here it refers to the entire created world with the exception of *the children of God*. While the adoption of



believers is a present reality ([Romans 8:14–15](#), not in our printed text), this fact can be obscured by the troubles of living in a sinful world. The suffering that results from our fallen world can further conceal the reality of redemption that is already present ([8:17–18](#)).

**20a. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it,**

Following Adam and Eve’s sin in the Garden of Eden, God cursed the ground as part of the humans’ punishment ([Genesis 3:17–18](#)). Through no fault of its own, creation was thwarted from flourishing and *subjected to frustration*. (The verb form of the Greek word is translated “became futile” in [Romans 1:21](#).)

The phrase *the one who subjected it* could be taken to refer to Adam as the reason for the curse rather than to the power behind the curse. This would be in error, although the thinking behind the supposition is sound: because humanity was to exercise wise rule over creation ([Genesis 1:26–30](#)), the fall revealed that people were not up to the task. As a natural outcome of humanity’s foolishness, creation suffers. Its caretakers fell into sin and were no longer capable of exercising proper dominion. However, in context it is clear that God is the one who subjected creation to futility.

**20b–21. in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.**

In the midst of the curse, God made a promise: “I will put enmity between [the serpent] and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” ([Genesis 3:15](#); compare [Romans 16:20](#)). Creation, despite its suffering, has reason for *hope*! The crushing of Satan’s head was good news not only for all who put faith in Jesus but for all of creation.

*Bondage to decay* further defines the “frustration” of [Romans 8:20a](#) (above). Since human sin resulted in creation’s fallen state, only when the *freedom and glory of the children of God* is finally and fully gained will *the creation* be released from the curse as well. The Greek word translated *glory* (compare [Romans 8:18, 30](#)) can be interpreted in two ways: as an adjective to describe *freedom* or as a noun standing on its own. This second option would explicitly refer to believers’ status as being glorious rather than experiencing a glorious liberty. This goes beyond restoration to a fulfillment of God’s plan for people. The fate of creation is inextricably tied to God’s fulfilling his promises to those who have been adopted into his family ([Galatians 4:4–7](#)).

**22. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.**

*Childbirth* is painful (to say the least), but the healthy infant who is born brings immediate joy. The analogy captures a common first-century Jewish belief: that as the salvation of God drew near, conditions on the earth would worsen progressively, like the contractions that get



worse and worse until finally the baby is born. Portions of Daniel chapters 7 and 9 helped shape this expectation. Jesus also spoke of the difficulty of the end times, both concerning events that were near at hand and others that would continue until his return ([Matthew 24](#); [John 16:1–11, 31–33](#)). His disciples continued to speak of the troubles that would be seen before Jesus’ return ended this age (example: [1 Timothy 4:1–3](#)). All that pain, though, is meant to result in joy for the world. It is not a vain struggle.

*What Do You Think?*

How do you respond to the fact that creation suffers because of human sinfulness?

*Digging Deeper*

How can you intentionally care for God’s creation this week?

**23. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.**

*Firstfruits* as a concept comes from the Festival of Harvest, also called the Festival of Weeks ([Exodus 23:16a; 34:22a; Numbers 28:26–31](#); etc.). The people would make sacrifices to the Lord of the first grains they gathered. This expressed thanks for God’s providing the harvest and confidence that God would bless the people with bounty throughout the harvest season. Like the firstfruits of a harvest, the indwelling of *the Spirit* within believers is a kind of down payment, guaranteeing what is still to come ([Ephesians 1:13b–14](#)).

*Adoption* in the Roman world differed from our laws and customs. One common scenario would involve a wealthy Roman man who had no sons. He would adopt a promising young man from a poor family, paying the natural father for rights to bring the son into the new, adoptive household. This adopted son would be groomed to take over the family business, continue the good name of the adoptive father, and become the adoptive father’s heir. Such adoption is seen in the history of the Caesars, who frequently adopted a nephew or other male to inherit their title. Examples include Julius Caesar’s adoption of Gaius Octavius, who was later called Caesar Augustus, and Augustus’s own adoption of Tiberius. Adoptions such as these were familiar to everyone in the Roman world, but especially to residents of Rome itself.

Although believers are already children of God, we still await *the redemption of our bodies*, victory over physical death ([Romans 6:8](#); see [lesson 9](#)).

## ADOPTION

I was perplexed by the parents of my childhood friends. The children were my age, but their parents were much older than my own parents. I continued to wonder about this for years, not learning until I was a teenager that these were my friends’ grandparents. The cou-

ple had adopted their grandchildren as toddlers due to tragedy with the children's natural parents. This godly couple had given them their name, their home, and their love. Other than the ages of those parents, I might never have realized their family was different from mine; my friends were secure in their family, just as though it had never been otherwise.

Paul used adoption imagery to describe our future reward as sons and daughters of God. Christians become “co-heirs” with Christ ([Romans 8:17](#)), heirs to the glory of salvation promised to believers. We assume the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Christian, as our identifying mark to the world. And we continue our Father's business, seeking the lost for salvation. Are you living so that others recognize that your Father is raising you in his image and you are secure in his love?

—M. K.

**24–25. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.**

Christian *hope* is not wishful thinking or anticipating a probable outcome; rather, it is assured because hope is based not on our own faithfulness but on God's faithfulness to his promises ([Titus 1:2–3](#)). Still, *we do not yet have what we hope for*, because in that case *we* would no longer require hope. When Paul declares that “faith, hope, and love” remain and the last is the greatest ([1 Corinthians 13:13](#)), it is not because faith and hope are of dubious value. Instead, it indicates that when faith and hope are realized in Heaven, we will not need them as we do now, to anticipate our promised future. But love will still be required, even in Heaven. God has given us every reason for confidence, which gives us the patience to *wait for* our hopes to be realized (see [Romans 5:3–5](#)).

*What Do You Think?*

How does impatience affect your relationship with the Lord?

*Digging Deeper*

What opportunities has God placed before you to grow in patience?

## II. Present God

([ROMANS 8:26–30](#))

### A. The Spirit's Help (vv. [26–27](#))

**26. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.**

The state of the world can leave us so completely horrified that we are left speechless. *Our weakness* includes every piece of evidence that we live in a sin-sick and dying world. But when *we do not know what we ought to pray for*, the Spirit steps in on our behalf. This comes as no surprise since Jesus promised the Spirit would be his disciples’ “advocate” (John 14:16, 26; 15:26). Paul built on this, giving believers confidence that *the Spirit himself intercedes for us*. When words fail us, the Spirit does not.

*Groans* is the noun form of the verb “groan” in Romans 8:23 (above). This context suggests that the Spirit’s intercession also happens within ourselves. This is supported by the fact that creation does not speak in language but does groan in brokenness (see 8:22, above).

**27. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.**

*He who searches our hearts* refers to God (1 Samuel 16:7; 1 Chronicles 28:9; Psalms 7:9; 139:23; etc.). Note that, like Jesus, *the Spirit* only speaks *in accordance with the will of God* (John 14:10; 16:13). Though we may not always pray according to God’s will—especially since we do not know *the mind of* Father, Son, or Spirit—nevertheless the Spirit will only intercede in keeping with God’s plans.

#### *What Do You Think?*

How do your prayer practices reflect that the Spirit intercedes for you?

#### *Digging Deeper*

What changes can you make to remain aware of the Spirit’s help when you pray?

## **B. The Supreme Plan (vv. 28–30)**

**28. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.**

Even the darkest night of the soul does not mean we are cut off from God. Paul had an unshakable faith that all things are under the control of God, that *all things God works for the good of those who love him*. Faith in the sovereign God means believing that he is in control of all things. Even the evil in our world that causes the suffering of righteous people is not beyond his control.

Our problem is that of limited perspective. Only God can see how all things work together for good. The question about suffering, then, is not *why* (compare Judges 6:13), but *how long*. The *why* is because of human decision to turn away from God (Genesis 2:16, 17; 3:19; 6:3; Romans 1:21, 28). The question can only be *how long*—how long will the suffering continue until my soul is flooded again by God’s love and comfort (compare Psalms 6:3; 94:3; Revelation 6:10)?

*What Do You Think?*

How would you respond to Christians experiencing despair in their circumstances?

*Digging Deeper*

What other Scriptures would you cite to bolster faith, hope, and love in your fellow believers?

**29. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.**

While doctrines of foreknowledge and predestination are important to consider, Paul's letter precedes by centuries debates about these terms and does not address the arguments that future Christians would engage in. Rather, Paul's point is that God is working within a plan, not haphazardly throwing people or events together in some sort of cosmic or salvific experiment (compare [Ephesians 1:11–14](#)). Though chaos or chance may seem to rule the day, we take comfort that the Lord knew us long before we accepted the call to join him in his ultimate purpose for people: *to be conformed to the image of his Son* ([Psalm 139:13](#)). This is both a new creation and a re-creation, for to be made in the image of Christ is to be restored to our unsullied state of having been created in the image of God ([Genesis 1:27](#)).

As the first to rise from the dead into glory, Jesus' bodily resurrection made him *the firstborn* from the dead ([Colossians 1:18](#)). Because of his resurrection, we expect to be *among many brothers and sisters* who will also return to life (contrast [1 Corinthians 15:12–19](#)). The promise of our own resurrection is the ultimate hope we have in the midst of our sufferings (compare [Acts 23:6](#); [1 Corinthians 15](#)).

**30. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.**

Although elaborate and confusing doctrines have been offered to explain the concept of predestination, it is a rather straightforward idea as presented by Paul. In this context it means that God has made an earlier decision about our future (see commentary on [Romans 8:29](#), above).

This predetermined plan has three stages. First, God has *called* us, giving us the opportunity to respond to the gospel by faith. Second, a positive response leads to being *justified*, declared righteous through our faith in Christ because of his sacrifice on our behalf ([Romans 3:24–26](#)). The final stage is our being *glorified* when our own resurrections take place and we join Christ in Heaven for all eternity (compare [1 Corinthians 15:42–58](#)).

## Conclusion

### A. Hope for the Future



Christians have a hope that persists through the ordeals of life. Outside of faith in Christ, this hope is not possible. Still, we observe and experience suffering. Focusing on these things makes a person nearsighted. Only with an eye on our future glory can a Christian not only endure hardship but also thrive in the hope of God’s promises.

While we hope for the glorious future in Christ, we still have work to do. Though our minds turn to evangelism—and rightly so—these verses remind us that we also have a responsibility to *all* creation. God has made us stewards of his good earth. While people suffer, all creation suffers. Likewise, believers’ peace is the peace of the world; our glory will be the glory of creation.

We wait in hope for the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promises. May we, as people who have died with Christ and live again in the Spirit, be beacons of God’s wonderful intentions for all creatures, great and small.

## B. Prayer

Father, help us view suffering through the perspective of faith. Teach us to depend on your Holy Spirit. Thank you for your Son, who has purchased our freedom. In his name we pray. Amen.

## C. Thought to Remember

God is working all things together to accomplish his perfect will.

## INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

*Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).*

### Into the Lesson

Read each of the following statements, asking class members to raise a hand each time they hear a sentence they agree with. Pause after some or all of these and allow volunteers to explain why they raised their hand or, if no one raises a hand, why they did not.

1. I remember a time when life seemed hopeless.
2. The older I become, the more difficult life becomes.
3. This year has been hard for me.
4. I expect to have trouble in this life.

5. Even when things are bad, I have hope.

*Alternative.* Distribute the “Prayer Requests” exercise from the activity page, which you can download, to be completed as directed. After one minute, ask volunteers to share their responses, especially to the final question.

After either activity, lead into Bible study by saying, “Life can be difficult. But Jesus offers hope in all situations. Today we’ll examine one passage that explores this idea.”

## Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read [Romans 8:18](#). Divide the class into small groups (or pairs). One half of these groups should find examples of suffering that the New Testament church endured, while the other half should focus on Paul’s own life experiences. After a few minutes, list these examples on the board as groups call them out. Be sure to include instances from the Roman Christians’ experience (see the Lesson Context sections of lessons [9](#) and [10](#) for more information).

Discuss these answers; then ask a volunteer to read [Romans 8:19–30](#). Have the groups discuss what impact Paul’s words would have if Paul had *not* suffered or if the Roman Christians had *not* experienced hardships.

*Alternative.* Distribute the “Patterns in God’s

Will” exercise from the activity page, to be completed in pairs (or small groups) as directed. Bring the class back together after 15 minutes to discuss what they found. Supplement their answers with information from the lesson commentary as needed.

Following either activity, have volunteers call out ways that creation’s suffering is seen, and write their responses on the board. After a few minutes, have the students break into pairs to focus on one of the examples and come up with as many connections as possible between nature’s suffering and humans’ suffering. After about three minutes, ask them to imagine what a glorified resolution to the suffering might look like. For instance, how do both nature and humanity suffer because of pollution? Answers will vary but could include an end to respiratory diseases, clearer skies, etc.

Allow one minute for learners to reflect on their past and present struggles. Ask volunteers to share. Ask for some answers before discussing as a class how focusing on the Spirit’s intercession rather than the struggle itself can change their attitudes. Can they sense the Spirit’s presence in these struggles? What practices would help learners find peace and hope in the Spirit’s help?

## Into Life

Ask volunteers to share examples of their experiences of the Spirit's presence in a challenging situation. After a few minutes, allow one minute for the students to write a prayer of thanks for God's presence during a difficult time. Allow the students to pair up to pray for one another about any current difficult situations or in thanks for God's past care.

Encourage students to reflect on or complete the activity page in the week ahead. Encourage the students to come to class next week prepared to share either what action in addition to prayer they have taken on to address their concerns or how this lesson encouraged them in the struggles they faced.