

August 7
Lesson 10

MORE THAN CONQUERORS

DEVOTIONAL READING: 1 John 4:7-16

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Romans 8:28-39

ROMANS 8:28-39

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

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.



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KEY VERSE

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?
—*Romans 8:31*

LESSON AIMS

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

1. Tell how believers are “more than conquerors” through Jesus.
2. Suggest some challenges that seek to separate Christians from the love of Christ, and tell why they cannot succeed.
3. Make a statement of faith in Christ, expressing confidence in Jesus’ ability to keep him or her in the love of God.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Everything Happens for a Reason?
- B. Lesson Background
- I. No Chaos of Purpose ([ROMANS 8:28-30](#))
 - A. Working for Good ([v. 28](#))
 - B. Proceeding to Glorification ([vv. 29, 30](#))
- II. No Disconnect from Love ([ROMANS 8:31-36](#))
 - A. Nothing Spared ([vv. 31, 32](#))
 - When God Is for Us*
 - B. No One Condemns ([vv. 33, 34](#))
 - C. Nothing Separates ([vv. 35, 36](#))
- III. No Defeat by Foes ([ROMANS 8:37-39](#))
 - A. Our Overwhelming Victory ([v. 37](#))
 - Of Pain and Conquest*
 - B. God's Conquering Love ([vv. 38, 39](#))

Conclusion

- A. Undefeated
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Everything Happens for a Reason?

When a much-loved person dies, we often hear these sorts of things being said to the grieving: "God knows what he is doing; this is for the best." "It's hard for you to understand now, but God has a plan." "Someday you will understand why God did this." These are variations of the flippant statement, "Everything happens for a reason."

To make such statements is to put us in the untenable position of saying that our loving God is responsible for a horrible tragedy that has ripped hearts open. Yet this is not a Christian idea. It might "work" in Buddhism or possibly in extreme forms of Islam, but it is not a biblical idea. Why?

The Law of Cause and Effect proposes that there are reasons (causes) for all things that happen (effects). At one level, this is true, but there are two angles to consider. First, if we live in an entirely mechanistic world, then everything that happens is preordained because of the physical nature of the things involved. If this is correct, then it means that there is no free will because everything we do is merely the result of chemical processes in our brains; this is the worldview of science without God.

In contrast, those who hold to the cause-and-effect worldview but who also believe in God say that the only exceptions to mechanical processes are God's deliberate manipulations of the forces of nature. In other words, these two choices say that human tragedy is either the result of inevitable mechanical processes or the intentional intervention of God. Everything happens for a reason? Tragedy must then be a product either of impersonal natural processes or the willful actions of a supernatural God.

Yet this is not what most folks have in mind when they say, "Everything happens for a reason." What they usually mean is "Everything happens for a good reason." The implication is that something good always comes out of tragedy, even if we have to wait a long time to experience it.

All of this seems to have a biblical veneer when proof-texted by verses such as [Romans 8:28](#): "We know that in all things God works for the good." But how does this play out in real life, especially in the time of tragedy? Is there comfort to be found in "everything happens for a reason"? Today's lesson, taken from the marvelous words of [Romans 8](#), will help us see things from a biblical perspective.

B. Lesson Background

One of the most popular Roman deities of Paul's day was the goddess Fortuna, equivalent to the Greek goddess Tyche. Her popularity can be seen in that one of Paul's companions was Tychicus ([Ephesians 6:21](#)), a Greek name that means "fortunate one." Roman coinage of the first century often bore an image of Fortuna.

The Romans believed that gods and goddesses like Fortuna were in control of destinies. Much pagan religious activity was based on either determining the will of such deities through divination or influencing them through temple offerings or worship. The Romans believed their gods were capricious and unreliable, and that fortunes or luck could take a turn for the better or worse on a god's whim. In the book of Romans, Paul presents a view of the Christian God that is entirely different.

I. No Chaos of Purpose

(ROMANS 8:28-30)

A. Working for Good (v. 28)

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.

The context for this lesson is summarized by [Romans 8:18](#): “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” Even a time of the darkest night of the soul does not mean we are cut off from our God. Paul has an unshakable faith that all things are under the control of God, *that in all things God works for the good to 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.

HOW TO SAY IT

Fortuna (*Latin*) Fawr-too-naw.

Tychicus *Tick-ih-kuss*.

Tyche (*Greek*) Too-kay.

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 to be *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?

What are appropriate and inappropriate ways to use [verse 28](#) when counseling a fellow Christian who is in distress?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Regarding job loss
- Regarding a health crisis
- Regarding a death in the family
- Other

B. Proceeding to Glorification (vv. 29, 30)

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.

Paul’s confidence in God’s control over all things extends beyond present sufferings. The apostle speaks of our future and our past in powerful, dramatic ways. God knows us intimately and has known us even before our birth ([Psalm 139:13](#)). God foreknows us, meaning there has been no past time when God was unaware of us.

Furthermore, God has always had a single, deliberate plan for humanity: *to be conformed to the image of his Son*. 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 original, unsullied state of having been created in the image of God ([Genesis 1:27](#)). It is to be included *among many brothers and sisters* in the true family of God.

Paul’s description of Christ as *the firstborn* is a reference to his resurrection (see [Colossians 1:18](#)). 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.

Paul now explains in more detail this plan of God for our glorification. Although elaborate and troubling doctrines have been offered to explain the concept of predestination, it is a rather simple idea as presented by Paul. The word translated *predestined* means that God has made an earlier decision about our future. God is not making this up as he goes; he is in control of all things, even our destiny.

This predetermined plan has three stages. First, God has *called* us, giving us the opportunity to respond to the gospel by faith. Second, that response leads to being *justified*, declared righteous through our faith in Christ because of his sacrifice on our behalf ([Romans 3:24-26](#), lesson 7). 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](#)).

II. No Disconnect from Love

(ROMANS 8:31-36)

A. Nothing Spared (vv. 31, 32)

31. What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

As he often does in Romans, Paul teaches by posing rhetorical questions. These are questions for which the answer should be obvious to the reader. But it is important that we answer them if we are to understand his meaning.

First question: *What, then, shall we say in response to these things?* In other words, what should our reaction be to our present sufferings and to our future hope of glorification? The answer is implied in the second question: *If God is for us, who can be against us?* No one who matters, for Almighty God is the one who is in control of all things.

WHEN GOD IS FOR US

Every night, the parents reassured the children that they loved them, that God loved them, and that he would be with them, even if the family could not be together. This family lived in Ukraine during Soviet times. The state had outlawed teaching youth about religion, and those caught doing so could have their children taken from them. The family knew that any night the police could come and do just that.

This threat of separation hung over their heads for years. It had happened to others they knew. Yet the parents taught their children about Jesus despite the danger, and five of the seven siblings ended up in Christian ministry. They led and served vibrant churches that, after the fall of the communist government, reached their communities in ways unimaginable during Soviet times. Grandchildren grew up to form the backbone for many other ministries. Now great grandchildren are following in those same faithful footsteps.

All of this because two parents chose to “obey God rather than human beings” ([Acts 5:29](#)). Hardships push us to rely on God’s strength to overcome our foes and fears. Truly, if God is for us, then nothing can be against us!—L. L. W.

What Do You Think?

What was a negative situation in your life where things ultimately turned out God’s way despite circumstances and people arrayed against you?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Regarding a personal crisis of temptation
- Regarding a family crisis
- Regarding a church issue
- Other

32. He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

Third question: Will God refuse to *give us all things*? Paul answers this within the question itself by reminding us that God has already given us his greatest treasure: *his own Son* (compare [John 3:16](#)). It stands to reason that if God did not withhold the life of his precious Son, then it is unimaginable that God will withhold anything else.

We are reminded of Jesus’ prayer in the garden when he stressed to the Father a desire to be released from the looming crucifixion ([Matthew 26:39](#)). God did not grant this desire, for he was willing even to give the life of his Son. This is the ultimate basis of our understanding of God’s love for us ([Romans 5:8](#)).

B. No One Condemns (vv. 33, 34)

33. Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.

Fourth question: Who is capable of accusing us of not being righteous, of not being *those whom God has chosen*? The answer is the same as for the second question: no one that matters. God is the ultimate and final judge, and he has justified us. This means God counts us as innocent of all charges that might be brought to bear. God’s judgments are consistent, so we do not need to fear he will change his mind.

The phrase *those whom God has chosen*, by which Paul refers to himself and other believers, connects back to [verse 30](#), above. The call of God that leads to our glorification is not some mysterious, impenetrable process. It is God’s working out of his plan to restore us to his image and bring us to glorification through our own resurrection from the dead. These are the comforting promises that give us hope in our present sufferings.

34. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

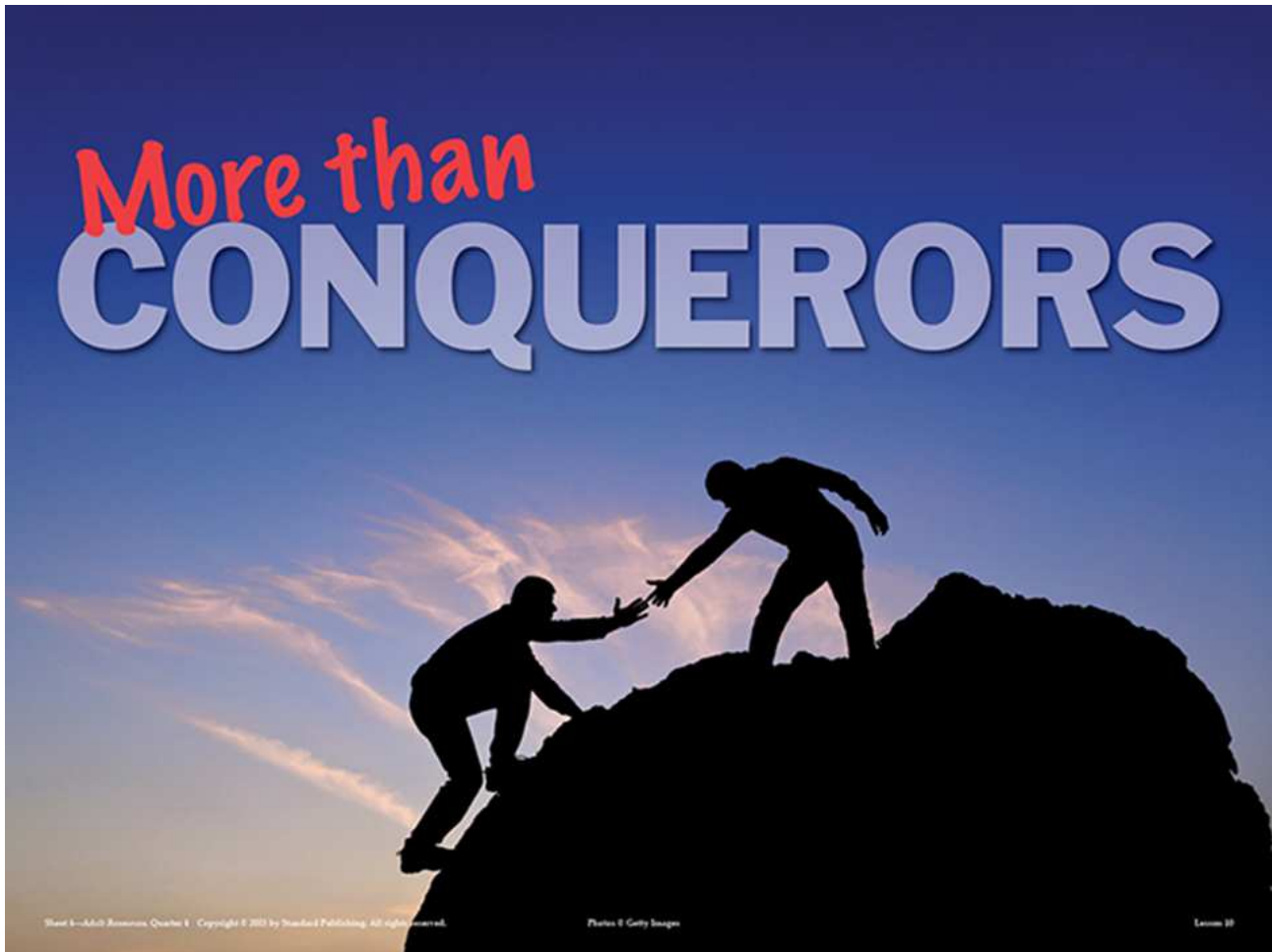
Fifth question: *Who then is the one who condemns?* In other words, who even has the right to judge us guilty and therefore ineligible for eternal life? One possibility is Christ himself, the man untainted by sin who now sits in a position of judgment *at the right hand of God*. But such a condemnation by Christ is unthinkable, for even though he has the right to condemn us, he died and rose again to do the opposite. He *is also interceding for us* as he pleads our case.

C. Nothing Separates (vv. 35, 36)

35. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or

famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

Sixth and final question: *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?* That is, who has the power to nullify the love that Christ has demonstrated for us in the past and continues to do so in the present?



Visual for Lesson 10. Start a discussion by pointing to this visual as you pose the question that is associated with [verses 38, 39](#).

The hypothetical yet real-world possibilities are sweeping. Can we be separated from Christ's love by difficult times and the distress that comes with them? No. Can our persecutors cause Christ to withhold his love for us? No. What about lack of food for daily sustenance? No. How about a lack of clothing that is necessary for warmth and self-dignity? No. Can personal danger and threat of death undo Christ's love for us? No.

The final image, the sword, is perhaps the most terrifying, since it is the brutal weapon of soldiers and the instrument of execution for Roman citizens. Paul himself will die by the sword about 10 years after he writes this letter. But we can be sure he never doubts the love of Christ, even as the blade touches his neck.

What Do You Think?

How can the threats of [verse 35](#) actually serve to draw us closer to God?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- When we are threatened personally
- When fellow Christians are threatened

36. As it is written:

**“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”**

I recently had a class of college freshmen write essays on this passage of Scripture, and I was surprised at how much this verse (a quotation of [Psalm 44:22](#)) resonated with them. Several wrote, “That’s how I feel!” They were responding to their situations of personal persecution for their commitment to Christ in the face of unbelieving and taunting family and/or friends.

Paul reveals how difficult his own path has been by this quotation. In his worst times of trouble, he has felt like a sheep being helplessly led to the place of killing and butchering. This image also helps us identify with Christ himself, for this imagery is applied to him as well ([Acts 8:32](#)).

What Do You Think?

How do you deal with opposition for being a Christian?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- In family relationships
- In work/school situations
- From the political arena
- Other

III. No Defeat by Foes

(ROMANS 8:37-39)

A. Our Overwhelming Victory (v. 37)

37. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Paul gives an emphatic answer to the multiple conditions of hardship he has set forth in [verse 35](#). We are not defeated by these very real trials, and we are not mere survivors either. Rather, *we are more than conquerors*. Those five words translate just one word in the original language. It is a striking word that conveys the idea of being “hypervictors.” Although the recipients of this letter may feel defeated, they are in fact winners, not losers. They are not helpless sheep lined up for slaughter. They are the ultimate winners, with gold medals draped around their necks.

We must not neglect the last part of this verse, though. Our victory is not one we have earned on our skill or merits, but one that has come *through him who loved us*. External threats cannot separate us from the love of Christ; let us not separate ourselves by claiming a victory apart from him. We are the champions solely because of Christ and his victory over the tyrants of sin, death, and the law (last week’s lesson; also see [John 16:33](#)).

OF PAIN AND CONQUEST

My friend’s parents divorced during her teenage years. For most of her young adulthood, she resented her parents for the pain they caused her, for the way their decisions affected her. She eventually married and started a family of her own, forgiving her family of origin in the process.

Years into the marriage, she and her husband hit the inevitable struggles that relationships bring. Financial issues, job loss, health problems, and psychological issues took their toll. But at one point she said to me, “My parents’ divorce saved my marriage.” She explained that seeing and experiencing the pain of that divorce caused her to realize that dissolution of that marriage had not solved the problems, but had merely changed their expression. This experience gave her the courage to stay in her own marriage and work through the issues that she and her husband had.

Although the pain resulting from her parents’ problems seemed insurmountable at the time, my friend came to realize that God had worked through those difficulties to produce in her a determination to keep her commitments to him, her husband, and her children. God can indeed use the trials of life to cause us to be more than conquerors!—L. L. W.

B. God’s Conquering Love (vv. 38, 39)

38, 39. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul ends with four additional sets of possibilities for being separated from the love of Christ. His list is breathtakingly exhaustive, covering the breadth of his frame of reference. These are not posed as questions but as answers to any possible objections that might be raised by anyone who doubts Christ’s love.

The first set, *death ... life*, addresses our mortality. Whether we are alive or dead, we are still bound to the love of Christ. This is an assurance that there is an existence beyond this current life, and that our loving God will not abandon us to the grave (compare [1 Corinthians 3:22](#)).

The second set, *angels ... demons*, addresses spiritual realities. Neither good spiritual forces nor evil ones have any capability to sever our connection with Christ’s love. Paul understands Christ’s victory over death as a defeat of the evil spiritual powers (see [Colossians 2:15](#)). They are still able to cause us grief ([Ephesians 6:12](#)), but they cannot isolate us from Christ and his love.

Paul’s third set addresses the possibilities of separation from a time perspective. There is nothing in the *present* time period and nothing in a *future* time period that can separate us from Christ’s love. Nothing now, nothing tomorrow, nothing a year from now, nothing a thousand years from now.

Following a general reference to *powers*, the fourth set, *height ... depth*, presents a spatial spectrum. There is nothing too high, whether the highest mountain peak or Heaven itself, to cut us off from Christ. There is no place so low, whether the depths of the ocean or the underworld, that can cause us to lose our connection with Christ. The final category of *anything else in all creation* is an inclusive catch-all to refer to any created thing.

God has shown us that he has no inclination or intention to withhold his love for us. God has proven this love through the giving of his precious Son as the necessary sacrifice for our sins. Since we do not have to doubt God’s love, we do not need to fear any possible scenario where

we can be separated from this mighty, marvelous love. The apostle emphatically highlights this by stating the fullest version of this love. His shorthand has been “the love of Christ” (v. 35). His longhand is *the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord*.

What Do You Think?

How can you live a more victorious Christian life?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

During spiritually “up” times

During spiritually “down” times

Conclusion

A. Undefeated

As this lesson is being written in early 2014, a rare thing has happened in college basketball: a team has finished its regular season without any losses, going 31-0. Despite this flawless record, the team is not ranked #1 in the national polls as it heads into the year-end tournaments. Teams that have losses are ranked ahead of this undefeated team. Several reasons are cited, but the main one is that this team does not belong to one of the so-called power conferences, and therefore its competition (“strength of schedule”) has been inferior. Its victories therefore don’t count as much. This is frustrating for the fans of this team. What more could their team do than win all of its games?

We may feel sometimes that our lives are rather unimportant since we don’t belong to a “power conference” of high-visibility Christians. We may feel that our daily struggles to love and obey God are insignificant and even trivial compared with those Christians whose lives seem very influential. Yet that is not the perspective of [Romans 8](#). All of us are important to God. All people are valuable to him. His love is so inclusive that he gave his Son as a sacrifice for the sins of all people, not just the rich or famous.

When Paul shouts, “We are more than conquerors,” he does not leave some of us out. When the apostle roars that nothing can separate us from the love of God, he does not follow with a list of exceptions. Let us live each day in the full assurance that God will never pull his love from us and that we have overcome the world through our faith in his Son.

B. Prayer

Loving God, sometimes we feel abandoned. May we take heart in the promises of Paul that we are never separated from you and your love for us, not even for an instant. May you dry the tears of our cold, hard lives with the warmth of your love. We pray this in the name of your Son. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Never doubt God’s love for you.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Into the Lesson

Display a collage of superheroes from comic books or pictures from the Internet. Be sure to include the more famous ones such as Superman, Spiderman, and Wonder Woman. Have this question displayed on the board as learners arrive: *When you were younger, which superhero power or powers did you most wish you had and why?*

After several minutes of discussion, make a transition by saying, “Sometimes when we felt especially helpless and vulnerable when younger, we may have fantasized about having super-powers that would solve our problems. But as Christians, we are in a better position than any fictional superhero. ‘We are more than conquerors through him who loved us’ ([Romans 8:37](#)). Let’s see how and why.”

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Know Your Fears” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Say, “Take no more than two minutes to complete this. No fair using smartphones to look up answers!” After discussing the answers, say, “It’s not surprising that most of you weren’t familiar with these rather obscure fears. But there are more common fears we know well: fear of suffering, fear of not being loved, or fear of God’s displeasure. In today’s text, Paul gives us powerful reasons why we can conquer our fears and feel safe in God’s love and protection.”

Into the Word

Form learners into pairs. Give each pair one or more of the following questions and accompanying Scripture references, printed on strips of poster board. For classes that can form more than six pairs, distribute duplicate strips.

“I’m really suffering—what is God doing about it?” ([Romans 8:28](#)) / “How can I overcome this feeling that my life has no purpose?” ([Romans 8:29, 30](#)) / “Why does everyone, including God, seem to be against me?” ([Romans 8:31, 32](#)) / “Since I’ve messed up so badly, how can Jesus not be upset with me?” ([Romans 8:33, 34](#)) / “How can I stop feeling like a total failure?” ([Romans 8:35-39](#)).

After pairs develop responses, have one person from each pair read the question and the other give the proposed answer. Possibilities: *Verse 28*: God is aware of our suffering and cares about us. He desires that we trust him to bring good out of our situation. *Verses 29, 30*: Since before we were born, God's purpose has been to conform us into the image of his Son. Everyone can respond to God's call, be justified through Jesus, and look forward to the glory of resurrected life in Heaven. *Verses 31, 32*: No matter how the circumstances of life seem stacked up against us, we can be confident that God is always on our side. He showed how much he cares for us by sending his Son to die on our behalf. *Verses 33, 34*: In sending Jesus to die, God was making it possible for us to escape the penalty we deserve for our sins. Since Jesus does not condemn us, we certainly should not condemn ourselves. *Verses 35-39*: Although life in a fallen world seems to bring defeat after defeat, Christ's ability to win the victory is stronger than anything that may cause us to feel as if we've failed. Paul's own life was a witness to these facts.

Into Life

Write on the board *No, Jesus loves me!* Point to it as you say, "Instead of the familiar chorus 'Yes, Jesus loves me,' respond in unison with this phrase, if you really believe it, each time I ask a question." Voice the following question seven times, using a different word or phrase within the brackets each time: "Will [*suffering, persecution, hardship, danger, death, Satan, anything else in all creation*] separate you from the love of Christ?" Close with a prayer praising Jesus for his great love.

Option. Distribute copies of the "Overcome Your Fears" activity from the reproducible page. Allow time to complete in class as indicated.