

Mission to the World Devotional

In the Grip of Grace

Written by Bryan Chapell

Devotional Formatting by Esther Meek

TO THE LEADER:

Your goal is to help your team understand and appropriate the grace-based promises God makes to believers. In particular, each participant should

- learn what God promises,
- realize that God's promises address their deepest needs and thus are the best news imaginable,
- understand how to live in light of these promises.

In his book, *In the Grip of Grace*, Bryan Chapell develops God's promises as they are expressed in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question #36, utilizing Romans 8 as his biblical text. In addition to working through this devotional, you may want to consider having team members

- memorize the catechism question,
- memorize all or portions of Romans 8,
- read *In the Grip of Grace*.
- record in private journals specific applications of God's mercy.

This devotional is divided into twelve studies, one per day. The studies correspond to the following portions of the original book (*IGG*):

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| • Day 1 | Introduction – The Best Promises... | <i>IGG</i> , Introduction |
| • Day 2 | No Condemnation | <i>IGG</i> , Chapter 1, part A |
| • Day 3 | When You Can't Hang On | <i>IGG</i> , Chapter 1, part B |
| • Day 4 | Vital Signs of the Spirit | <i>IGG</i> , Chapter 2, part A |
| • Day 5 | The Holy Spirit at Work | <i>IGG</i> , Chapter 2, part B |
| • Day 6 | Cadillac Christians/Pinto Saints | <i>IGG</i> , Chapter 3, part A |
| • Day 7 | Site Under Construction | <i>IGG</i> , Chapter 3, part B |
| • Day 8 | The Knot that's Impossible to Untie | <i>IGG</i> , Chapter 4, part A |
| • Day 9 | Humble Confidence | <i>IGG</i> , Chapter 4, part B |
| • Day 10 | Jesus Loves Me | <i>IGG</i> , Chapter 5, part A |
| • Day 11 | More Than Conquerors... | <i>IGG</i> , Chapter 5, part B |
| • Day 12 | Godliness in the Grip of Grace | <i>IGG</i> , Chapter 6 |

The devotional may be adapted in a variety of ways to fit your own team's time together. Choose one of these alternatives, or devise your own strategy:

- for a 12-day trip, use one study per day;
- for a 10-day trip, assign Day 1 (introduction) and Day 12 (conclusion) to be done individually before and after your trip, and use Days 2-10 in your group studies;

- for a 5-7-day trip, because the studies are written two to a chapter, you may do Days 2 and 3 on the same day, perhaps morning and evening, perhaps one individually and the other corporately, and the same with Days 4 and 5, Days 6 and 7, Days 8 and 9, and Days 10 and 11. Employ Days 1 and 12 to accommodate your schedule.

In this devotional, words such as **DISCUSS**, **READ**, **STUDY**, and **JOURNAL** will help direct you and your team's activities.

- **DISCUSS:** Your team can discuss these questions together. Or if you have asked team members to work on these portions individually, personal responses to these questions may be recorded in the devotional book or in a personal journal.
- **READ:** Your team may read these paragraphs out loud together. Or they may be read silently or individually.
- **STUDY:** This indicates that you are to look at the Bible passage named to respond to the questions given. Responses may be written in the devotional, or they may be discussed orally, or both.
- **JOURNAL:** Actions indicated to be written individually, either in the devotional or in a journal intended for private reflection and prayer.

As you prepare to lead this study, please determine ahead of time how you will employ these various aspects of the studies. Decide, for example, whether your group will discuss every question written for discussion, whether the group will have worked through the study individually before coming together to share responses, whether individuals will write their journal responses during your group devotional time, or as a "homework assignment."

Please supply each team member with a colored marker pen to answer questions and participate in the exercises in this devotional guide. Each member may use his or her copy of the devotional book for all written responses, including journal responses.

DAY 1: INTRODUCTION – THE BEST PROMISES IMAGINABLE

Warm Up

DISCUSS What is the most outrageous promise you've ever heard?

DISCUSS When we tell people about Christ, why might we be tempted to make outrageous promises?

DISCUSS What sort of promises might we be tempted to make?

READ *In the Grip of Grace – the Devotional* is written to help you identify, cherish and appropriate the promises God really makes to believers.

- Identify – because sometimes believers are not sure what God promises;
- Cherish – because sometimes believers know the promises but don't see that they're particularly valuable;
- Appropriate – because sometimes believers struggle to trust God's love.

DISCUSS Which of these categories describes your own outlook, or that of believers you know?

Work Out

DISCUSS What do you think God promises believers? Circle your answers.

1. financial security
2. conversions resulting from my ministry
3. political or social freedom
4. God's unwavering regard for me, despite past and recurring sin
5. children that "turn out"
6. freedom from guilt of confessed sin
7. freedom from persecution
8. freedom from God's condemnation
9. physical safety
10. Holy Spirit's power for obedience
11. "*hakuna matata*"

12. freedom from spiritual struggle
13. freedom from the power of sin
14. physical health
15. the spouse of my dreams

Leader: Use this exercise to prompt discussion about why participants picked the answers they did. Answers need not be identified as correct or incorrect at this time, but will be useful for comparison in the course of the study: 4, 6, 8, 10, 13.

READ The courageous saints who composed the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* to encourage believers facing persecution four centuries ago, expressed God's promises to believers in this way:

The benefits which in this life accompany or flow from justification, adoption and sanctification include:

*assurance of God's love,
peace of conscience,
joy in the Holy Ghost,
increase of grace, and
perseverance therein to the end.*

God's bringing people to saving faith involves his graciously forgiving believers their sin and declaring them righteous solely because Jesus suffered and died for them—justification. He also graciously makes believers part of his family—adoption. He graciously continues to work everyday, by the Holy Spirit, to make believers more like Jesus Christ—sanctification. God's gracious activity in each of these dimensions results in the benefits the Catechism lists.

These five beautiful benefits are the real promises of God for believers' lives today, and they undergird the thoughts in this book. These are what we really can expect God to fulfill in this life. God does not promise every believer more money and fewer headaches. God promises confidence of our relationship with him. Christians whose joy is full have discovered happiness in what this world cannot offer and cannot deny. The promises of grace are not recorded in a bankbook, they do not rely on a doctor's diagnosis, and difficulty cannot erase them. By focusing on the genuine benefits of grace, Christians can rediscover the promises God designed to make their lives more satisfying and less selfish, more fulfilling and less driven, more peaceful and less guilt-ridden....Come, put yourself in the grip of grace.

DISCUSS Lives that are "more satisfying, more fulfilling, and less guilt-ridden": how might guarantees of these things be more welcome than even physical health or financial success?

DISCUSS Do you think it is possible for believers to have "confidence in our relationship with God"? Why or why not?

Cool Down

DISCUSS Which one of the benefits listed in the catechism looks especially appealing to you? Why?

DISCUSS What would you like to ask God to teach you or to do for you through this study?

DAY 2: NO CONDEMNATION

*The benefits which in this life
accompany or flow from
justification, adoption and sanctification
include:
peace of conscience*

Warm Up

READ "I am a freak!" the young man screamed, fists clenched, then dropped his head and began to sob in desperation and agony. The pastor had been looking for him for two days: a young Christian leader named "Jim" who, facing numerous difficulties, had fled his home. Already stressed by a drawer of mounting bills, Jim had learned in one day's time that his wife was expecting twins and that he had been fired from his job. The pressure was too much. Jim cleaned out the family bank account, took the family car and left town for a liaison with a former lover.

The pastor spotted Jim in a neighboring town, and cornered him at a fast-food restaurant. Hopeless beyond the energy to resist, the limp rag doll of a man let himself be driven back to the pastor's office. There limp resignation turned to angry defiance, and Jim spoke in a bitter torrent of tears:

"I am a freak! I am supposed to be a Christian leader in this community. I am supposed to lead others to Christ. But I do what I hate! I can't control my own body. I even ran out on my family. I am hopeless! hopeless! Why did God make me this way? Why does he tolerate me? How can he love me after this? I am a freak. I am a freak!"

JOURNAL Can you think of times in your life when you have felt like Jim, or of particular recurring sins which plague you in the same way? Using a password or a date to designate them, record some of the ones you remember.

READ “Storms of conscience” are these episodes when our guilty conscience causes us to question God’s love. They rage in our hearts when we sin, assaulting God’s promised peace. Our goal is to learn how we may deal with such storms of conscience, our own and others’, confronting them with the Word of God and laying hold of the “peace of conscience” which God promises believers.

Work Out

READ On a cliff one cold Missouri day my brother Gordon scared some peace into me. A highly trained Air Force rescue specialist, he promised to teach me mountain climbing “in one easy lesson.” I was uneasy, especially after he told me that our other brother had refused his offer as “too dangerous for a family man.” But Gordon broke me in easily, teaching me on gently sloping bluffs how to use the rappel rope. No problem, I thought!

But then it was time to graduate: he took me to a cliff that sliced backward high above a rushing, rock-strewn river. As I started to back off the cliff one hundred feet in the air, I realized just how small was the line on which my life depended – about a half-inch thick! That was when I slipped.

Off the cliff I fell like a stone – for about three feet! Then that thread of a rope caught me and held me over the rocky river. Blood pounded in my ears; my breath sounded like a runaway steam engine, my eyes darted back and forth in panicked questioning from rocks below to rope above. But I hung there. That specially designed, high quality, super strength climbing rope held me. It didn’t break. I didn’t fall.

Gradually I relaxed. Somehow being in such great danger and yet so secure created a sense of overwhelming peace. The tranquility of the moment remains etched in my memory.

In Romans 8 the apostle Paul shows believers God’s love is like that rappeller’s rope. It will not break despite the pressures put on it by a slip into sin, the collapse of circumstances, or a fall arranged by Satan. God’s love will hold against these pressures that we might think would put our souls in eternal danger. If God’s love will never, never fail, what is the result of a Christian’s being in such great danger while being so secure? Peace!

Today and tomorrow we will see how the Word of God speaks peace to three storms of conscience: the storm of self blame, the storm of self-doubt, and the storm of self rejection. Always we will find that absolutely nothing can loosen the hold of God’s love, the divine grip of grace.

The Storm of Self Blame

READ I told you the story about my young friend Jim because he experienced the painful onslaught of storms of conscience, and his angry cry expressed all three such storms. Jim cried, “I am a freak!” In essence, he said, “I am no good.” This is the storm of self-blame.

Into the teeth of this storm we must cast the words of Romans 8:1: "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

STUDY Read Romans 8:1-4.

Does God promise that once we are Christians we won't sin anymore?

Does God say that it's okay for believers to sin?

Does God say that mistakes aren't really that bad, because everybody makes them?

What phrases in the passage indicate how God feels about sin?

How does what God did in Jesus Christ enable Him to broadcast grace without minimizing sin?

Leader: You may lead your group to reflect also on Romans 3:22-26.

READ Christ's death in one divine gesture indicates both how great is God's love and how terrible is sin. Sin in people and on them is so horrible that the life of Christ was required to pay its penalty. But, even as God affirms the seriousness of sin by Christ's death, he broadcasts the hope sinners have through the cross.

These truths of Scripture change Christians' efforts to find peace; instead of trying to belittle sin they now claim the grace of God. God does not ask them to calm a storm of conscience by pretending it is not serious; he encourages them to confront it with a more powerful force: God's power.

DISCUSS How does God's action offer a pattern for how we should deal with the storm of self-blame?

JOURNAL Across your list of storms (earlier in this study), write with your colored pen:

I confess: These are awful! I am guilty!

Jesus completely paid my penalty!

God's grace is greater than ALL my sin.

No condemnation!

I claim the peace of pardon.

In private prayer, take this action to heart.

DISCUSS How then does Scripture enable us to calm the storm of self-blame? "What benefit has God promised to believers in this life?"

Cool Down

READ Jim's confession was the beginning of spiritual healing and real strength against further temptation: The truth of God's forgiveness, more than all the guilt a conscience could muster or another person's condemnation could bestow, led to his renewed strength, spiritual health, and peace.

DISCUSS Is God's forgiveness a better motivator than a guilty conscience? How does this work?

DAY 3: WHEN YOU CAN'T HANG ON

*The benefits which in this life
accompany or flow from
justification, adoption and sanctification
include:
peace of conscience*

Warm Up

READ Yesterday we likened God's love to the rappeller's rope that held me safely in the face of great danger. God's love is what holds you when all else gives way, even your own obedience.

DISCUSS Why do some Christians struggle to believe this?

DISCUSS What "rope substitutes" do people put their hope in? How successful are such substitutes?

Work Out

The Storm of Self-Doubt

READ Understanding that there is no condemnation for those whose sin is forgiven through Christ helps still the storm of self-blame that troubles many believers. But even as the storm of self-blame is dying, another storm gathers on the horizon. When Jim, the young man we met in yesterday's study who had deserted his family and succumbed to temptation, shook his fist at heaven, he not only said "I am not good," he also said, "I am not strong." Even though the past was forgiven and future sin would be forgiven, his conscience remained tormented by the knowledge of his weakness against powerful forces of temptation to which he had succumbed many times. Many of us can identify with this storm of self-doubt raging in Jim's mind.

The storm of self-doubt is the belief that we are helpless to avoid falling into the same sin again and again, even when we know better. Read the apostle Paul's graphic description of this awful feeling in Romans 7:15-24.

JOURNAL If you were to make a list of those sins which you feel helpless to prevent,

would it match the list you made yesterday?

JOURNAL Do the items on that list, even though covered with the declaration of “No condemnation!” return to accuse you of your helplessness? Why is this?

DISCUSS Does the Bible teach that the believer should expect to be helpless until heaven?

STUDY Reread Romans 8:5-14.

What phrases does Paul use to describe the believer?

Does the passage indicate that the believer is able or unable to triumph over sin?

READ What does it mean that “you . . . are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit” (read Romans 8:9-11)? It means you are not merely freed from the guilt of sin by the sacrifice of Christ, you are freed from the power of sin by the Spirit of God at work in you. Your bodies are not lifeless puppets controlled by passions beyond you. God puts the life of his Spirit in you and gives you power over the destructive forces of sin just as he gave Jesus power over the grave.

Satan would love for Christians to believe otherwise. But this is a lie, a lie that Satan uses to defeat us. Sometimes we want to believe otherwise so that we can have an excuse to sin.

DISCUSS How is it to Satan’s advantage to have us believe that we cannot change our sinful practices?

DISCUSS Do you sometimes use an appeal to your own helplessness to excuse your own sinful behavior? When questioning whether we can resist temptation, what happens when we say, "I can't—"? How is life different when we say, "I can—"?

STUDY Read 1 John 4:4, Philippians 4:13, and 1 Corinthians 10:13. Do these verses represent an "I can't—" or an "I can—" approach to resisting temptation—helplessness or hope?

DISCUSS How can we change sinful patterns in our lives?

DISCUSS What concrete steps can we take in our battle against temptation?

Leader: answers discussed ought to include believing that we are free from condemnation, claiming the promise that we are not helpless, fleeing temptation (avoiding situations in which one is especially exposed to temptation)(Proverbs 4:14-15) as well as seeking help in the accountability of other believers or in counseling, even getting rest and exercise. Discuss how these concrete tactics are expressions of the Spirit's work, not replacements of it.

READ Above all I must remember that no matter how weak I feel, God assures me in his Word that I am stronger than the sin that confronts me. I can change. Because God's Spirit is in me, God's strength is in me. I can resist. I am not helpless. I am not hopeless. God by his Spirit has given me power over my greatest spiritual enemies. This Spirit of God now grants me peace amidst the storms of self-doubt by granting me strength against the forces of Satan. No longer Satan's puppet, I am controlled by the Spirit who grants life and peace.

JOURNAL Take action: Using your colored pen, across yesterday's list of storms of

conscience, inscribe these additional words:
I am controlled by God's powerful Spirit.
I can change!
In private prayer, take this action to heart.

DISCUSS How then does Scripture enable us to calm the storm of self-doubt? "What benefit has God promised to believers in this life?"

The Storm of Self-Rejection

READ Even when the terror is taken out of the storms of self-blame and self-doubt, there is yet an angry squall of conscience that sinners must navigate, which contains the most devastating winds that anyone can face. Our friend Jim, the tormented young man, cried, "I am not good, I am not strong," and he concluded, "I cannot be God's." Perhaps you, too, know this cry. It is the ultimate despair that blows from the storm of self-rejection. You find it impossible to believe you could be guilty of such serious sin and still be God's.

STUDY In Romans 8:9-11, what conditional phrases may make Christians question whether the promises being made always apply to each of us?

DISCUSS Is it possible that someone who sins repeatedly might not be God's and might not have the Holy Spirit living within? Is it appropriate to assess someone's standing with Christ on the basis of his or her behavior? Why or why not?

Leader: You may wish to allude to Matthew 7:15-20 and I John 1:6-10. The discussion may be lively, for the Bible encourages us to evaluate the validity of our faith by the evidence of good works in our lives, but never to believe such works are the cause of our acceptance by God – nor that our earthly lives are ever free of all vestiges of sin.

READ To some extent you must listen carefully to the cries of conscience that blow from this storm of self-rejection. It is true that a life in rebellion against God, a heart that is hardened, or a lifestyle of sin may truly be indications that a person is not God's.
Where there is no conscience, there cannot be a storm of conscience to calm.

Interestingly this is just the point: if you have a spiritually sensitive conscience, then despite the presence of sin you can still claim the gospel of peace, because such a conscience is itself evidence of the Spirit of God in you. The evidence that you are God's is not an absence of sin but a conscience stricken by sin.

STUDY In Romans 8:6-7, how does Paul describe the unbeliever? If your conscience is not hostile to God, even though you sometimes sin, what does your sensitive conscience indicate about the Holy Spirit's work in you?

STUDY Proverbs 30:20. Does this unbeliever experience a storm of self-rejection?

DISCUSS Who provokes godly sorrow over sin and grief over loss of relationship with God – Satan or the Holy Spirit? Apart from God, is there any true sorrow for sin?

DISCUSS When we sin, what does our concern about God's rejection testify about his work in our hearts and his hold on us?

READ In Romans 8:14-15, Paul describes a "spirit of Sonship." By the Spirit "we cry 'Abba, Father.'" To know whether you are a child of God, do not ask whether your life is sinless, but whether your heart is sonlike. Do you still long for his love? Do you grieve for his hurt? Do you ache for the pain of him who gave his only Son for you? When your spirit cries out in love for your heavenly Father, then it testifies of the Spirit of God in you that marks you as a child of God. Such love leads you to the Father in new confession, new obedience, and new assurance of your relationship with him, despite past failure. When the heart cries out, "Abba, Daddy," the heavenly Father experiences joy and the child's heart knows peace.

Sometimes you must search deep into your heart to find the truth. But if the truth you find is this, Yes, I sorrow for my God, my Father, then you have mined the gold that is eternal security.

DISCUSS How can we have a sonlike heart even when we are not sinless?

DISCUSS How can our godly sorrow bring the Heavenly Father joy?

JOURNAL Referring to at least of one of your recurring sins, take the following steps:

1. Write an "Oh, Daddy, I'm sorry!" prayer. As concretely as you can, tell God that you grieve over the damage you have done to your fellowship with Him.
2. Pray this prayer to your Heavenly Father.
3. Meditate on what you have done, allowing your own Spirit-induced sorrow to testify to God's hold on you.

DISCUSS How then does Scripture enable us to calm the storm of self-rejection? Which of the benefits listed in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* that God promises to believers in this life applies to this storm?

Cool Down

DISCUSS Review the three storms of conscience that we have discussed on days two and three. For each, choose a verse from Romans 8 which the Holy Spirit uses to calm the storm. Ask individual members of the group to read these verses out loud, or recite these verses together.

DISCUSS What does it mean to be "in the grip of grace"?

DAY 4: VITAL SIGNS OF THE SPIRIT

*The benefits which in this life
accompany or flow from
justification, adoption and sanctification
include
peace of conscience,
joy in the Holy Ghost...*

Warm Up

READ In the attic somewhere I have a newspaper given to me by my mother. She saved it when World War II ended. In large, six-inch type the paper's headline declares, "PEACE." When the word spread in her Tennessee town that the dying was over, she told me, the people poured out of their homes and businesses to dance in the streets. My mom danced in the streets! Now, that must have been something, because she was raised an old-school Methodist, and they just didn't do that sort of thing. The explanation is easy. When there was life and peace after so much dying, spontaneous joy had to flow. Overflowing, wondrous, beautiful joy always flows when a war is over.

STUDY Reread Romans 7:15-8:4. What kind of a war has been going on? Who or what is defeated, and by whom? What phrases indicate that the peace made prompts great joy?

Work Out

READ The writers of the Westminster Catechism understood that if one of God's sure promises to the believer is peace, then joy is sure to follow. They borrowed the phrase, joy in the Holy Ghost, from Romans 14:17, but Romans 8 describes the very special kind of joy that God promises his people. In Romans 8, the Holy Spirit is mentioned more times than in any other chapter of the Bible.

STUDY Read Romans 8:1-28. Mark each occurrence of the words, "Spirit," or "Holy Spirit."

List some of these things that the Spirit does, or that we do because of the Spirit's work.

JOURNAL In Romans 8, we can identify what the Spirit does *in* us, what he does *for* us, and what he does *through* us. These prepositions stand for three major prompters of spiritual joy we will explore in this study and the next. Review your list of the Spirit's activities. Try to label each one with one of these prepositions, *in*, *for*, and *through*.

DISCUSS What is one phrase that you think best describes what the Spirit does *in* us (see vss. 9-11)?

DISCUSS What is one phrase that you think best describes what the Spirit does *for* us (see vss. 15-16)?

DISCUSS What is one phrase that you think best describes what the Spirit does *through* us (see vss. 26-28)?

The Holy Spirit's Work in Us: Creation of New Life

READ The work of the Holy Spirit *in* us is the creation of new life. As God breathed the spirit of life into man at the creation, God now breathes the Holy Spirit into Christians so that their bodies and spirits are alive in a new way. What was characterized by death, decay, and the domination of sin is now characterized by eternal life, spiritual healing, and power over sin. Christians are new creations, fundamentally different from what they were before the Spirit entered their hearts.

STUDY In Romans 8:5-13, mark the words. "life" and "death."

DISCUSS Can you think of some other Bible passages that talk about new life in Christ?

Leader: Possible responses include II Corinthians 5:17, about our being new creations; John 3, about our being born again; Ephesians 2, about our being dead in sin, then made alive in Christ. As time permits, you may have team members look at these verses.

READ We need only look to our own experiences to know what joy there is when life comes where only death was expected. In a hospital near us a newborn baby stretches and yawns as though his life is no more challenging than a summer afternoon in the shade. We know differently. While this baby whom newspapers called Baby John was still in the womb, physicians learned that his heart was defective. He would soon die. So before he was born, doctors determined he should have a heart transplant. At just the right time, doctors delivered Baby John from the womb where death awaited him and gave him a new heart. Where once there could be only death there is life. We are amazed. His parents are overjoyed.

DISCUSS How is a person's coming to Christ like Baby John's story?

DISCUSS When the physical life of a person like Baby John is in question, doctors and nurses regularly check for "vital signs," or signs of life. Name some physical vital signs hospitals check to monitor a newborn's physical health.

STUDY The apostle Paul describes spiritual vital signs, realities we can look for that help us monitor spiritual life. In the verses indicated, look for and describe these signs:

New desires, verse 5:

New abilities, verse 9:

New sense of obligation, verse 12:

New deeds, verses 13-14:

Contrast these with the signs of a defective heart, verses 7-8:

READ New hearts result in new and different lives. Progress may not be rapid in all

areas or constant in all periods; nonetheless, fundamental changes are inevitable when a new heart begins to beat in a person. The Holy Spirit means for us to experience great joy when we see these vital signs of our own spiritual life. When we see these signs, we receive one of God's promised benefits, the assurance that the Holy Spirit has brought to life a heart that was dead.

JOURNAL Think about your own life. Write down some of the spiritual vital signs that you see—new desires, abilities, sense of obligation, and deeds, that stem from your conversion. Reflect on your personal list of vital signs. Allow them to indicate the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. In prayer, appropriate their assurance of God's love, and give thanks for this assurance.

DISCUSS Suppose Baby John's parents were told that though he now had a new heart, his fair skin indicated that as a teenager he would struggle with acne; would this difficulty dampen their joy about his life?

READ Concern for Baby John's fair skin illustrates how it is that believers can experience joy despite very real hardship and adversity. When the vital signs of the Spirit indicate we have been set free from the power of sin and death forever, we should be overwhelmed with joy. Our gladness may at times be tempered by present or anticipated difficulties, but no earthly setback should outweigh the blessing of eternal life ensured by God's Spirit. Where there is life there is joy.

JOURNAL List some of the hardships in your own life, cares that can weigh you down. Ask yourself: is my joy tied to the resolution of these difficulties, or is my joy tied to the Holy Spirit's putting new life in me, my assurance of God's eternal love for me?

DISCUSS If a believer struggles to be joyful in difficult circumstances, what steps can he or she take to restore the joy of salvation (Psalm 51:12)?

DISCUSS What benefit in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* list has God promised to believers in this life even in the face of real hardships? How does Scripture enable us to experience joy in the Holy Spirit?

Cool Down

DISCUSS Much in this culture that passes for faith attempts to offer material prosperity and health for believing in Jesus. In light of what we have discussed, how is this attempt misguided?

DISCUSS What happens when Christian leaders lose their own testimony of joy? How does this impact the people they shepherd?

DAY 5: THE HOLY SPIRIT AT WORK

*The benefits which in this life
accompany or flow from
justification, adoption and sanctification
include
peace of conscience,
joy in the Holy Ghost...*

Warm Up

READ Yesterday we discussed how the Holy Spirit gives us joy as we are able to recognize the vital signs of the life he has created *in* us. You made a list of your personal vital signs of spiritual life. If you had to pick one of those signs as offering the most obvious evidence of his creating new life in you, which would it be?

DISCUSS What sort of evidence have you seen in others' lives to demonstrate his gift of new life?

Work Out

READ Today we'll look at what Romans 8 says the Holy Spirit does *for* us, and what he does *through* us. As we believe and embrace these promises, we experience the benefit that accompanies our salvation.

The Holy Spirit's Work for us: Confirmation of a New Position

READ I can't remember when I have felt so out of place. Church friends had invited me, a young seminary student, to a fancy dinner party. I wore my best suit – navy polyester, by that time vintage quality. Amidst tuxedos and black ties, it stood out painfully. I was on my best behavior, but the high society manners of most of those present made my country-bred efforts awkwardly evident.

Then a fellow about my age drifted over to talk. He wore tattered blue jeans, an old plaid shirt, and a pair of waffle-stomper boots. I was amazed: he looked worse than I did, yet he seemed totally oblivious to his apparent poverty and inappropriate attire. In fact, he exuded a carefree confidence.

Only after he walked away did I understand why. Friends told me that I had just met the heir of a local chemical company fortune. He was wealthy beyond my

imagining.

Still his father wanted him to experience “real life,” so the young man was currently living without the full benefits of his wealth.

But he was not distraught because of his rags or because he did not fit in at a dinner party. The riches that were assuredly his as an heir made these temporary concerns incidental. His inheritance made him confident in the face of present difficulties. In fact, his lack of concern about his present poverty actually underscored this heir’s future wealth.

STUDY Read Romans 8:14-25. In what ways does this passage say that we are like the young heir to the chemical fortune?

To what are we heirs (see vss. 17-18)?

What things in our lives make us “groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons” (see vs. 23)?

What assurance do we continually need that the Spirit continually gives us (see vs. 16)?

How does the certainty of our future hope affect our attitude about our current rags (see vss. 18 and 25)?

JOURNAL In your own life, do you perceive the Holy Spirit’s testifying with your spirit that you are God’s child? Your answer to this question perhaps will not be a quick and ready, “Yes!” But stop to remember some of the things that we have already discussed on earlier days that evidence God’s working in your life. Are you confident that nothing can separate you from God’s love, not even your sin? Does your conscience grieve for your fellowship with God when you sin? Were you able to detect vital signs of the spiritual life God has created in you? Do these not count as the Holy Spirit’s

witnessing with our own spirit that we are children of God? List some of these now as ways the Holy Spirit testifies to us of your sonship.

JOURNAL List the hardships in your own life which threaten to rob you of joy. With a colored pen write across this list:

I am a son.

I am heir to God's fortune.

I consider that my present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in me.

Take some time to appropriate these promises, and to respond in thanks to God.

DISCUSS How can we use the brokenness of this world to fuel our longing for the promised time when God restores all things? List some practical ways we can do this.

The Work of the Spirit through us: A Channel of New Power

DISCUSS Name some things that display tremendous power. Compare the power of a great river with the power of a laser used in eye surgery. How is the power of a laser different than the power of a river?

READ Like a laser, the Holy Spirit's power is focused and precise. It does not overwhelm us but comes alongside to address a specific need.

STUDY Read Romans 8:26-28. According to this passage, what do we not know (see vs. 26)?

DISCUSS Give examples of how we don't pray as we ought *because we don't know the will of God*. Is it right or wrong to think that we *should* always know the will of God?

DISCUSS Give examples of how we don't pray as we ought *because we lack fervency in our prayers*.

STUDY What specific help does the Holy Spirit give us with our inability to know what to pray for (see vs. 27), and our inability to pray with an adequate fervor (see vs. 26)?

STUDY What is the promised result – verse 28?

READ The Spirit of God molds both the content and fervor of my prayers, so I am confident that God's loving, good, and perfect will shall be done. Because of this work of the Spirit "we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Here is an amazing discovery: The God of all creation works through my prayers to do his will. What a joy to understand the marvelous work of the Spirit in my prayers, not just because of the power for good that may be channeled through me, but because of the burden taken off me. I do not have to say everything right, or do everything right, to have things turn out right.

God does not promise that all *seems* good in this fallen world, or that all is done with good motives by sinful people, but he does promise that he is sufficient to work all things into his good purposes. Because of the Holy Spirit, for every believer who prays, all is working together for good – and that is sufficient cause for joy.

DISCUSS How does knowing this specific help of the Spirit in prayer "take the burden off me" to figure out what God should do?

JOURNAL Pray to God, thanking him for the Holy Spirit's ongoing, arduous ministry in your behalf.

DISCUSS What benefit listed in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* has God promised to believers in this life when we are saddened by the inadequacies of our prayers? How does Scripture enable us to experience joy in the Holy Spirit?

Cool Down

DISCUSS When we recite the Apostles' Creed, we say, "I believe in the Holy Spirit." In light of our discussion, what concrete things does this testimony mean?

DAY 6: CADILLAC CHRISTIANS AND PINTO SAINTS

*The benefits which in this life
accompany or flow from
justification, adoption and sanctification
include
peace of conscience,
joy in the Holy Ghost,
increase of grace...*

Warm Up

READ “You are what you drive.” Do you remember the car commercial that made that insightful psychological observation? I found the ad’s character analysis insulting. Maybe that was because at the time I was driving a vintage Ford Pinto registering over a hundred thousand miles, sporting flaking brown paint, needing new tires, and staining my garage floor with a persistent but undetectable antifreeze leak. I am that? Oh, no!

Just as the commercial assessed my worth in terms of the car I was currently driving, believers sometimes assess their spiritual worth in terms of their current experience. Why might it be misleading to do this? In particular, how do I feel if . . .

I am new in the faith?

I have recently sinned?

I compare myself with the progress of others?

In Romans 8, an entirely different perspective appears. I am on a trip, but it is not *what* I am driving that characterizes me. It is *where* I am heading. My destination marks me.

Work Out

READ A sign recently appeared on the route that I jog announcing a large estate near us would be subdivided for the building of eighteen new homes. The proposal seemed preposterous. Everyone I know who saw the sign also concluded it was crazy to try to build eighteen homes on that land. There was a big lake, lots of trees, and a twisting drive that already swallowed most of the property. We could see no way to fit eighteen homes on the site. But we were not looking with a developer’s eye.

The developer knew he did not have to settle for what was there. What made the land valuable to him was not its current condition but what could be done with it. The developer envisioned and evaluated the land without the limitations of its current conditions. He did not settle for the “what is,” but planned for what could be. The same is true of God as he looks at us. He considers our value in the light of what he plans to make us rather than on the basis of what we are.

STUDY Read Romans 8:28-30. If we compare God’s work in our hearts to the developer building on the unlikely property, what phrases in verses 29 and 30 parallel the

following stages in the typical work a developer must do:

site selection (see vs. 29a):

site planning (see vs. 29b):

site preparation (see vs. 30a):

site clearing (see vs. 30b):

the final edifice (see vs. 30c):

READ By seeing how God builds, Christians can understand why they are valuable to God despite the sin and weaknesses of their current condition. Their limitations do not thwart God's plans for their development and thus do not depreciate their worth.

Site Selection and Planning: "those God foreknew he also predestined..."

DISCUSS Romans 8:29 begins by saying that God has foreknown and predestined believers. If God knows ahead of time what he is determined to do in a person's life, what does this indicate about the value God places on that person, even if there are present problems?

DISCUSS If God has destined a person for God's purposes, what can we surmise about whether God thinks these purposes will be accomplished?

DISCUSS How does the fact that God's building process is stated entirely in the past tense (vss.29-30) confirm the certainty of the outcome?

DISCUSS In light of this certainty, is there anything in our lives that presents God with an insurmountable obstacle to achieving his purpose?

Site Preparation: "he also called..."

READ The Holy Spirit prepares the believer for spiritual development by making us alive and able to respond to the gospel. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* says that this "effectual calling"

*is the work of God's Spirit, whereby,
convincing us of our sin and misery,
enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ,
and renewing our wills,
he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ,
freely offered to us in the gospel. (Question #31)*

DISCUSS Would spiritual development be possible without the Holy Spirit's "site preparation?"

STUDY Review the account of Lazarus (John 11) and the Apostle Paul's characterization of us prior to our conversion (Ephesians 2:1). How do these passages graphically portray the necessity of God's calling us to life by his Spirit?

Site Clearing: "he also justified..."

READ Before construction of the eighteen homes on the former estate near us began, the builder straightened the twisting drive. He removed trees. He even moved the lake. The land was cleared of every hindrance to the new construction. Spiritual construction requires a similar wiping away of past problems. God pardons all past sin, removing our guilt as far as the east is from the west to declare us justified – made righteous by Christ's sacrifice in our behalf.

DISCUSS How does God's justification "clear the site" for his future efforts in our lives (see especially vss. 2-4)?

STUDY How does Romans 8:1 signal that God's clearing process is complete in those who trust in Jesus' work? How does the tense of the verbs in Romans 8:30 confirm this completion?

The Final Edifice: "he also glorified..."

STUDY In verse 30, what word is used for the culmination of the divine developer's completion of his work in our behalf?

STUDY What other phrases in Romans 8 indicate what the final edifice will look like (see especially vss. 21-23)?

DISCUSS If a believer is "conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ (vs. 30), what will he or she be like?

DISCUSS How does the Word's description of the divine developer's plan for our lives encourage us that he values us not in terms of current experiences but in light of his own future goal for us?

DISCUSS Using the developer illustration, explain how it is possible both for God to disregard past and present failure when assessing our worth, yet to take action to clean us up as he brings his purposes to fruition?

JOURNAL List several current reasons or experiences that tempt you to think that you are of little value to God.

READ Believer, you may feel like a Pinto saint, but you are always a Cadillac Christian to God. Because of God's increasing grace, you are already valued in accord with his glorious purposes for you. You are predestined to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers (verse 29). God tells you the end of your Christian walk at the beginning of your faith journey so that your joy may be full all along the way.

JOURNAL With your colored pen, write across your list of current experiences:

- My God assesses my worth not in light of these current experiences, but in light of his own certain finished product, being conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ.
- Or, using the metaphor of the shabby Pinto, write:
I am on a journey. Because of God's grace and power, I am not the car I drive; I am my destination.

Take time in prayer to appropriate this awesome divine assessment.

DISCUSS How does this Scripture encourage our confidence in God's assessment of our worth?

Cool Down

READ What does it mean to "foreknow"? Fritz Rienecker, the language expert, says to foreknow means "to fix the regard" one has about something or someone. By indicating foreknowledge about something, I signal that I have determined its worth to me. If I am invited to see a movie, and I say, "I already know all about that movie," I indicate that I have already assessed its value. Of course my human judgment is likely to be inadequate and mistaken. Not so God's. His perfect assessment is in accord with what he will accomplish as the divine architect. The value he places on us is entirely accurate. And he considers us as precious as he does his own Son. When he looks at us he sees Jesus.

DISCUSS What are the practical ramifications of the fixed regard indicated by God's foreknowing us? Can we do anything that will lessen or gain more of God's affection?

DISCUSS How does knowing God's fixed regard affect the way we live as Christians?

DISCUSS What are the effects in the lives of believers who think they must continually earn God's affection?

DAY 7: SITE UNDER CONSTRUCTION

*The benefits which in this life
accompany or flow from
justification, adoption and sanctification
include
peace of conscience,
joy in the Holy Ghost,
increase of grace...*

Warm Up

READ With the apostle Paul's guidance we can see the spiritual architecture of site preparation, site clearing, and final edifice in the believer's calling, justification, and glorification. But something appears to be missing. Paul's description seems to jump from land clearing to building completion. Where is the *building process*?

DISCUSS In Romans 8:29-30, how does the fact that no mention is made of the "building process" confirm that God values believers in light of their final development, rather than in light of their current level of righteousness?

Work Out

STUDY Read Romans 8:28-30. What phrase describes the building process?

READ The process of conforming believers more and more to the likeness of Jesus, which is ordinarily called sanctification, in fact has been described in Romans 8:28. God is at work, working all together for good to them that love him and are called according to his purpose of making us more like Jesus. This is the Christian construction process.

Fence of God's Care

READ When the construction began on the estate near us, the builder placed a large fence around the property. He allowed nothing through the gate except what aided the development of the new homes.

In the process of sanctification God fences our lives with his purpose and allows nothing to enter except that which develops us more into the image of Christ Jesus. The circle of God's care is one of the Christian's greatest comforts. It assures us nothing enters our lives except that which is working for our ultimate good.

DISCUSS Describe a time in your life when the circle of God's care, knowing that God allows into your life only what will produce your ultimate good, has been your greatest comfort.

DISCUSS Does this promise guarantee that all things will seem good and easy to us?

DISCUSS Does this promise guarantee that no evil remains in the world (see vs.22)?

DISCUSS Does this promise make it inappropriate for us to grieve or to lament suffering (see vs. 23)?

DISCUSS Many circumstances, in our own lives and in others', are so difficult that for a time it may seem impossible for the grieving believer to testify to God's goodness. Does God's acceptance of us rest on our being able to testify to his goodness? How can we pattern our own sympathizing with others' grief after God's example?

Increase of Grace

READ God's construction process is meant to give you hope as well as endurance as a believer. If all that enters your life conforms you more to the likeness of Jesus, as long as you live God is constructing you to be like his own Son. God is still not settling for the "what is." Because things keep happening your life, God is still building. As long as you live, God works. He wiped away the debris from your past and destined a glorious future for you, but he also improves on you right now. Each new event in your life is an addition of grace. As long as things keep entering your life, grace keeps increasing.

DISCUSS In Romans 8:28-30 we learn that God's regard of us is fixed in light of the certain final product. We also learn that he is actively at work in every event of our lives, "increasing grace." How does God's assurance of the final product and of his loving regard for us in light of that destiny affect our outlook on the things going on in our lives? Apart from this sure destiny, would we believe that he assessed us on the basis of our performance? Would we interpret his day-to-day dealings with us as "increase of grace" or increase of our need of "works" to secure his care?

Loving Discipline

READ The fact remains that each of us continually sins. Doesn't God punish sin? Doesn't he get angry at unrepentance?

Yes, this is true. God responds by disciplining us. But discipline does not deny his love; in fact it confirms it. God only disciplines to prevent you from persisting in sin that endangers. What father does not seek to turn a child from danger or to discourage him from actions that will lead to greater hurt? In the throes of his greatest chastening, you are never loved less.

Yes, cavalier sin angers and hurts God. When God says, "This hurts me more than it does you," he really means it. Your sin required the sacrifice of his Son. Your sanctification requires that he look past the suffering of his own Son to care for the person who caused it. But his pain is never more intense than his compassion. His discipline is never the sign of rejection; it is the mark of your preciousness to God (compare Romans 8:15-16 and Hebrews 12:5-6).

DISCUSS Should every hardship in life be interpreted as God's discipline? Consider Romans 8:17 and 8:22-23.

JOURNAL Describe a time when you felt that God responded to a particular sin in your life by bringing adversity. At such times, are you inclined to believe that God is rejecting you because of your failure to perform, or that he is disciplining you in love?

JOURNAL Take action: with your colored pen, inscribe on top of your description above:

- The Lord disciplines those he loves;
- God disciplines me; therefore I am precious to God.

Take time to meditate on and appropriate this perspective.

DISCUSS How can you encourage someone who tends to think in terms of performance/rejection to think in terms of grace/discipline?

DISCUSS What “increase of grace” has God promised to believers in this life?

Cool Down

READ We must be careful not to make other believers fear the rejection of God. If anyone must climb to his favor, we shall all fall. If his regard for us is not fixed, we will never win his affection by our performance.

To turn believers from sin on the basis of God’s rejection is to create bitter, hard, prideful people, but not more Christ-like people. A biblical view of the unlimited, unchanging love of God is the only path to healthy holiness. Unless the love of Christ constrains us to do his will, our hearts will be no closer to God even if our behaviors change.

DISCUSS What are some relationships in which we are tempted to motivate holiness on the basis of rejection?

DAY 8: THE KNOT THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO UNTIE

*The benefits which in this life
accompany or flow from
justification, adoption and sanctification
include
peace of conscience,
joy in the Holy Ghost,
increase of grace,
and perseverance therein to the end.*

Warm Up

READ She is thirty-three. Her husband, a minister, ran off with the church organist eighteen months ago. The worst of the pain, the shock, and the court dates are all over. It is time to close that chapter of life, to try to collect oneself, and to move on. But she cannot. She cannot seem to resolve to do anything.

Someone suggests that she talk to a pastor, and she does. When she speaks to him, it is not about anger, not about depression, not about guilt. She speaks of fear. She says, "I don't know if I can trust myself. I thought my husband had it all together. I worshiped him for the faith I thought he had. I still don't know anyone who knows more about God and the Bible. If now he says he's not a Christian, how do I know I will be? I'm scared to step forward in any direction. What if the same cliff over which he fell is out there waiting for me, and somewhere, someday, I'm going to fall off it, too?"

DISCUSS If you had to comfort and counsel this woman, what would you say? Why is it so difficult to address her question?

Work Out

READ We use the phrase, "the perseverance of the saints" to express the biblical truth of God's abiding care for all believers. God promises that when he savingly binds us to himself, no one and nothing can undo that binding. The faith that is genuine is perpetual. We do not have to worry that there is a cliff of sin or circumstance out there that might cause us to fall away from God, because he is the one who guides our paths and upholds us with his everlasting arms. Because God's grace alone unites us with him, we can expect *perseverance therein to the end*. This is the promise of Scripture. In Romans 8 we can find three *proofs of perseverance*.

STUDY Read Romans 8:28-30.

Does this passage tell us the outcome for every individual believer?

Is there anyone who is justified who is not then glorified?

Recall from the discussion of the last two days: how certain is the outcome, and how does the passage indicate this certainty?

STUDY Read Romans 8:38-39.

Circle or list the things that will never separate us from the love of Christ.

Is the list complete, or is it possible that some other thing, not on the list, might break the bond of love that unites us to God through the work of Jesus?

How would you respond to a well-meaning believer who points out that *sin* is not in the list, and my sin does separate me from the love of Christ? It may help to refer to verses 31-34 in your response.

Read John 6:39, and John 10:28. How do these verses express the believer's perseverance in God's love?

STUDY Read Romans 8:28.

For whose good does God promise to work?

Read verses 5-8. What has to happen for a person to love God?

Therefore, the people for whom God promises to work all things together for good are...

What does verse 29 say is the ultimate good that God promises to work (or "conform") in true believers?

Does this promise guarantee that we will no longer fall into sin?

Will your imperfections and weaknesses separate you from God's love? Will serious sin separate God's children from his love?

Respond to this claim: *Because God has promised to work for our ultimate good, we can infer that God will not allow us to draw one breath beyond belief. If we were about to indulge in some unpardonable sin or engage in some unforgivable lifestyle, then in terms of our ultimate good it would be better that God take us now than lose us forever. It would be far better to lose a few moments from the life the Bible says is only a handbreadth of eternal time (Psalm 39:5) than to live the full span of earth's existence only to inherit the pains of hell forever. No one's ultimate good could be served by living to the point that they are no longer God's. If God knew we were going to untie the knot of our salvation, his love would require that he deny us the opportunity. How then does Romans 8:28's assurance that God works all things together for good confirm the promise that believers will persevere in saving relationship to God until the end?*

DISCUSS Does perseverance depend on our personal determination, or does it depend on God's effort?

JOURNAL Has there ever been a time in your life when you worried that you would not make it to the end of your life as a Christian?

If your answer is no, can you describe your confidence in terms of the biblical proofs of perseverance that we've studied today? Write a prayer that expresses your confidence using these promises. Take time to offer it to the Lord.

If your answer is yes, describe in writing some of the times you have been tempted to fear that you might lose your salvation. With your colored pen, write across your description the following:

Because God has justified me, he promises to glorify me.

Nothing, not even my sin, can separate me from the love of Christ.

God promises to make me like Jesus, so he will not allow me to draw one breath beyond belief.

Take time in prayer and meditation to appropriate these promises of perseverance.

DISCUSS What benefit in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* list has God promised to believers in this life who doubt that God will keep on loving them?

Cool Down

READ As our family walked a nature trail on a recent trip we came to a tree identified as a limber pine. Our guidebook said the tree got its name from the unusual flexibility of its limbs. The branches are so limber that a person can tie a knot in them as though each limb were a thick strand of rope. The guidebook invited us to test this quality by tying a knot in one of the limbs ourselves.

Our boys clamored for the opportunity to tie a knot in a branch! But the branches were higher than the children could reach, and the hundreds of nature

walkers preceding us had knotted every branch within adult reach.

So I lifted each child above my head so that he could untie a knot and then re-tie it for the “limber pine experience”. But what if the knots had been out of reach at the top of the tree? Nobody could have reached them, let alone untie them.

When God binds us to himself in love, he does so with a knot tied so high it is in heaven. It is impossible for God’s children to reach such a knot to untie it. God’s promise of peace, the life-changing work of the Holy Spirit, and the continuing provision of grace are works of heaven that bind us to God. Since God secures the knot of grace that binds us to him, it will persevere against the pressures that threaten to loose it. A knot tied by men could be undone, but a knot made by God is beyond man’s reach and invulnerable to this world’s unraveling tensions.

DISCUSS How does the picture of a knot impossible to untie express the security we can have in our relationship with God?

DAY 9: HUMBLE CONFIDENCE

*The benefits which in this life
accompany or flow from
justification, adoption and sanctification
include
peace of conscience,
joy in the Holy Ghost,
increase of grace,
and perseverance therein to the end.*

Warm Up

DISCUSS Yesterday we discussed God's promise to keep his children bound to himself in love to the end. Today we'll see God's *purposes* in assuring us of this unloosenable knot. As you reflect on what you learned yesterday, how does the assurance of your own persevering in God's love impact your life?

Work Out

Personal actions: perseverance promotes holiness.

DISCUSS Many people through the centuries have thought that a belief in this doctrine of perseverance takes away all motive for righteous living, leading to carefree sinful practice. They reason, "Have perseverance, will party." Have you known people who denied the promise of perseverance because they feared this abuse of God's love? Have you known people who lived with sinful abandon because they felt they were, "once saved, always saved?"

STUDY Read Romans 8:28.

To what sort of people has God promised perseverance in the faith? [Answer: "In all things God works for the good of _____" (fill in the blank).]

Since perseverance applies only to those who love God, why are those who are trying to take advantage of God's grace really without assurance of his continuing care?

Which of the following questions does the doctrine of perseverance naturally lead us to ask about our behavior –

How much can I get away with?

Does what I am doing express my love for my God who sacrificed his Son for me?

How does asking the naturally prompted question result in true holiness, whereas the other does not? What is true holiness – loving service or doing as much as I can get away with without crossing God?

People attitudes: perseverance promotes love of other believers.

Perseverance, in addition to promoting holiness, also prompts us to love other believers. If we love God, we naturally love what he loves, and *those* he loves.

STUDY Reread the proofs of perseverance in Romans 8:28-29, 30, and 38-39.

If these promises apply to you, do they not also apply to other believers?

How does this realization prompt an attitude of respect and love toward other believers?

In light of God's persevering love even for errant Christians, how would you assess a commitment to doctrinal orthodoxy that is accompanied by arrogance, insult, and disrespect?

Does doctrinal disagreement require disrespect?

What are some concrete ways that we can express respect even while retaining a commitment to sound doctrine?

Perseverance proven by resonating hearts:

DISCUSS Perseverance requires self-scrutiny. Self-scrutiny inevitably exposes our inadequacies. If we assess our personal actions and our people attitudes, and we find unholiness and lack of love, does our inadequacy weaken the knot of perseverance?

DISCUSS Which attitude should exposing our inadequacies prompt within us – fear or humility? Why?

DISCUSS Why does an honest appraisal of our ability to meet God’s standards always lead us to Christ?

READ The Jefferson Barracks Bridge which crosses the Mississippi River near St. Louis reflects an architectural design call the tied arch. A series of cables suspends the roadbed from one massive supporting arch. For the bridge to support the intended load, the cables must remain at a very specific tension. It is not enough that the cables look as though they can support the weight, or even that they partially do the job for which they were intended. If the tension is improper the whole support system is jeopardized.

To adjust the cables and insure the integrity of the bridge, a sensing device is placed on the cables. It tests tension by plucking each cable like a huge harp string to see if it is tuned to the proper resonance. Whether or not the bridge will hold is revealed by the tone each cable emits.

DISCUSS How, in a similar way, is God’s hold of perseverance on us revealed, not by our perfect behavior, but by the tone of our hearts?

DISCUSS What is the attitude of heart that proves God’s hold on us? For the answer, look again at Romans 8:28.

JOURNAL The heart tone that is truly Christian reverberates with loving humility for the forgiveness our sin requires and echoes grateful obedience for the grace our God provides. Examine your own heart using this “resonance test.” Write down what you find that resonates (or does not) with the loving humility and grateful obedience that characterize a heart “in synch” with God.

DISCUSS How does the presence of attitudes “in synch” with God assure us that God has an unwavering hold on us?

Perseverance provides confidence

READ Because the power of God holds Christians who desire to fulfill his purposes, they are marvelously equipped to serve him. They can attempt great things for God without the fear that their failure will mean they have fallen from his grace. We are released from paralysis because we know we are called for a purpose.

During the Christmas season our family reads portions of the advent narratives each night. We use a manger scene to recreate the events as we read, allowing the children to add the large ceramic figures to the crèche on the mantel.

When the children were small, our tall mantle made this an impossible task for them. Yet they could hardly wait to put the create in place each year. How could this be?

Our children remained enthused about assembling the manger scene because they knew their dad would lift them up so they could put the figures in place. They were confident of their own hands because they knew that other, more capable hands would hold them. They knew no fear.

DISCUSS How can the knowledge that your Heavenly Father's capable hands hold you better enable you to face challenges in your life?

JOURNAL In the light of your security in the grasp of your Heavenly Father, what do you think that God is asking you to attempt? Describe this in writing.

Is your attitude one of fear of failure, or one of confidence in God's care?

How can your confidence be enhanced by reflecting on God's promise of your perseverance?

Read Philippians 1:6. With your colored pen, copy this verse below your description of what you believe God is asking you to attempt. Take time in prayer to appropriate this promise and to express your gratitude to God.

DISCUSS God's "increase of grace" includes adding whatever effort from him is needed to maintain his grasp on us. How do his ongoing efforts in your behalf affect your attitude toward him? How do his ongoing efforts affect your willingness to serve him?

Cool Down

DISCUSS How could we use what we have discussed about the proofs and purposes of perseverance to encourage someone like the woman we talked of yesterday, whose spiritual self-confidence was shattered by her husband's rejection of Christianity?

DAY 10: JESUS LOVES ME

*The benefits which in this life
accompany or flow from
justification, adoption and sanctification
include
assurance of God's love,
peace of conscience,
joy in the Holy Ghost,
increase of grace,
and perseverance therein to the end.*

Warm Up

DISCUSS Why do you think that the writers of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* listed assurance of God's love first?

DISCUSS What are some ways that the Apostle Paul has already demonstrated God's love in Romans 8?

Work Out

DISCUSS What simple child's hymn is the first theology lesson that most children of believers learn? [Hint: The opening words are "Jesus loves _____."] Why do you think this is the first Christian song so many of us learn?

READ The understanding that Jesus loves me is the core of what each Christian must believe. We teach this truth early in our children's lives because we know the reality of Christ's love must be planted deep into the very fiber of each maturing believer. Young hearts and minds must learn to grasp this elemental promise in the earliest moments of faith, because so much of what awaits them in life will threaten to rob them of the assurance of God's love.

JOURNAL List some experiences and/or behaviors in your life which have led you to doubt God's love, or which currently lead you to doubt God's love.

Identify which of the following labels apply to the various experiences and/or behaviors you have listed:

Past sin

Ongoing sinful habits

Difficult circumstances

DISCUSS If you had a child who was prone to doubt the very thing he or she most needed to be assured of, to what words or tactics might you resort to secure his or her assurance?

STUDY With your own assurance techniques in mind, evaluate Paul's "no holds barred" approach to assuring readers of God's love as you read Romans 8:31-39.

Love Greater than Past Sin

STUDY In verses 33 and 34, what sort of legal setting is envisioned?

Who are the participants, and what are their roles?

What sort of action is being ruled out of order? Why?

What would you say to someone who had been pardoned by the highest judge in the highest court in the land and yet refused to believe the pardon was sufficient to secure their freedom from guilt?

READ A few years ago I preached a sermon on God's judgment of adultery. After the message a distraught young woman approached me. With many tears and obvious heartache she said she was guilty of such sin. She told what she had done and then asked, "How can I ever get rid of this guilt?" I encouraged her to confess the matter fully to the Lord and ask his forgiveness. When she responded, it was my turn to weep.

She said, “Oh, I did that five years ago.” I wondered what I had said or done that made this young woman think that God’s pardon was not enough. I recognize as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ it is my duty to seek to convict of sin – there is no more rewarding time in ministry than when God’s people see their sin and seek him. But to convict of sin is never the end goal of a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. My task as a servant of Jesus is not merely to convict of sin but to convince of grace. Our constant message for God’s people must be, “Gather all the guilt that is yours – nothing more and nothing less – take it to the cross of Jesus and lay it down. Then do not pick it up again. It is not yours anymore.”

JOURNAL Evaluate your own ministry, whether formal or informal, to congregation, to friends or family, in light of the alternatives described in this illustration. Has your emphasis lain on conviction of sin without convincing of grace? If so, what can you do to repair matters and correct the imbalance?

DISCUSS Once past sins are truly confessed, does any guilt before God remain? May any consequences remain? Do continuing consequences get misinterpreted as continuing guilt? Why is this misinterpretation devastating to spiritual maturity?

DISCUSS What practical steps can a believer take to deal with the ghosts of past sins which continue to haunt him or her?

DISCUSS Is it possible that some of these ghosts have not been laid to rest because repentance to date has been incomplete?

READ The human heart is complex enough that serious sin may require more than formula prayers and simple maxims before full forgiveness is felt or warranted. Repentance that leads to the full experiencing of God’s pardon requires us to bare our souls before God’s holy love. Such disclosure follows honest sorrow for sin and the humble desire that God’s Spirit would reveal and forgive any further darkness to which our sinful consciences are blind. Sincere repentance may require much soul searching and personal reflection. For this reason we should examine ourselves for dimensions of sin we’ve not previously recognized so that we can fully know the joy of forgiveness.

Still, no human heart is so discerning of the depth of its own sin and the righteousness of God that the promise of full forgiveness should be made contingent upon human perceptions. We are forgiven because of our plea for grace and our

acknowledgement that we can never fathom the depth of our need, not because we have completely identified the sin that God alone can fully see.

DISCUSS What would happen if God's forgiveness depended on whether we had fully grasped the many dimensions of our sin?

DISCUSS Why would making God's pardon contingent on flawless memories of sin and absolutely correct repentance ultimately destroy the message of the gospel? Why, then, is it still important to be conscientious in our repentance?

JOURNAL Take time to examine your own heart regarding your past sins, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal to you any unconfessed dimensions. Claim God's promise in 1 John 1:9 as you pray.

Love Greater than Present Sin

JOURNAL Describe some of your own ongoing sins.

STUDY Romans 8:34 describes Jesus Christ's current location and ongoing action in our behalf.

Where is he?

What is he doing?

When is Jesus interceding for us?

How does this promise of Christ's present intercession assure us that even sins we do today will not deny us God's love?

Read Micah 7:18. What does this verse say about how God feels about showing mercy to us?

READ Satan parades the sin in your mind to rob your heart of the assurance of God's love and to sap your life of the strength that comes from knowing God will not reject you. Do not stand for it! Jesus died to pay the price for your sin. He rose to defeat the power of sin over you. Now he intercedes for you at the right hand of God to make sure that God's care will never fail you. So when Satan creeps into your conscience to condemn you, look to the cross where your sins were canceled and say to him, "Yes, your accusations are true and you cannot cite the half of all my true guilt, but I have to deal with the one who delights in showing mercy. Jesus loves me. This I know, for the Bible tells me so."

JOURNAL With your colored pen, inscribe phrases from these words just quoted across your lists of present sins. Take time in prayer to appropriate these promises. You may also want to meditate on the words of this old gospel chorus:

*He signed the deed
With his atoning blood.
And ever lives
To make his promise good.
When hosts of sin
Go marching in
To make a second claim,
They all march out
At the mention of his name.*

*They all march out
At the mention of his name.*

*They all march out
At the mention of his name.*

DISCUSS Can I be assured of God's love despite past sins and present failures? Which of the benefits promised to believers in the Westminster Shorter Catechism should you claim when Satan haunts your conscience with the guilt of past sins and present failures?

Cool Down

DISCUSS The Apostle Paul in Romans 8 asks, “What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?...Who shall bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?” How does this compare to saying, “Checkmate”?

DAY 11: MORE THAN CONQUERORS THROUGH HIM WHO LOVED US

*The benefits which in this life
accompany or flow from
justification, adoption and sanctification
include
assurance of God's love,
peace of conscience,
joy in the Holy Ghost,
increase of grace,
and perseverance therein to the end.*

Warm Up

READ “Can you watch little Stevie?” his desperate dad asked me over the phone. “The new baby is coming and we have to go now to the hospital.”

The new baby was coming much earlier than anticipated, too early for the plans these young parents had made for their three-year-old’s care to work. We were happy to stand in the gap. Little Stevie wasn’t so sure.

All went well until bedtime. Little Stevie wasn’t thrilled about going to bed in a strange house without his mom and dad. And as we slipped Stevie into his pajamas, a thunderstorm began to rumble.

We put Stevie in bed, and I began to pat his back to try to calm him. My arm wore out long before the little boy nodded off. Then, just as his eyelids seemed ready to close for the last time, our doorbell rang.

Standing at our door in the pouring rain was Stevie’s dad, a sheepish grin on his face. “Sorry, false alarm,” he said, as he entered to retrieve Stevie. As we walked down the hallway toward Stevie’s bedroom door a huge thunderclap suddenly shook the house. The windows were still rattling when a white-cotton-pajama streak tore out of the bedroom. Little Stevie flew down the hall and into his father’s arms.

The father held his child close and said, “It’s all right Stevie. I’m here. I’m right here.”

The storm still blew, the thunder still roared. But the child did not cry anymore. He knew he was in his father’s care.

DISCUSS What adjectives would describe Stevie's outlook after he was in his father's arms? How does this picture our relationship with the heavenly Father when life's challenges thunder about us?

Work Out

Love Greater than Difficult Circumstances

DISCUSS When believers experience difficult circumstances, why might they be inclined to question God's love?

JOURNAL List some difficult circumstances in your own life. Describe how you may have interpreted God's care for you in light of these circumstances.

STUDY Read Romans 8:31-39.

In verses 35-36, what sorts of hardship does the apostle Paul acknowledge can beset the believer?

Why, in difficult circumstances, is the fear that God no longer cares the worst fear of all?

What does Paul say can be our response to such adversity? (see verse 37)

Why? (See verses 38-39)

READ The end of Romans 8 reminds us that the most important resource in facing difficult circumstances is assurance of God's love. Paul readily concedes that believers will face sufferings and persecutions in this world. But Paul victoriously concludes that such things cannot overcome God's love. Even when our world terrifies us, our God holds us close to himself through the work of Jesus. In that embrace of grace our worst fears are conquered. We realize that circumstances do not deny his care, because in his Word our heavenly Father keeps whispering, "I'm right here, child. I'm right here. You are in my care."

STUDY In Romans 8, God assures us of his abiding care. What does God promise in each of these passages, and how does it assure us of his love in difficult circumstances?

With regard to the future – verses 18-25:

With regard to the present – verses 28-29:

With regard to the past – verses 31-32:

READ I have learned from my wife that requiring what we treasure to undergo difficulty does not mean we value it less. Kathy is a gifted musician. When I first began dating her I had to learn a few things about the special relationship between a professional musician and her instrument. I once picked her up after a concert and started to put her flute in the trunk of my car along with our coats and a music stand. I quickly learned that the flute would not go in the trunk. That flute would not even ride in the back seat of the car. It had to ride in the front seat with us.

Kathy cared so much for that flute because she spent years working and saving to buy a quality instrument. Since that date early in our relationship, I have seen my wife play her instrument in a great variety of circumstances. I have seen her play under

hot lights, in freezing cold, even in driving rain. But no matter how difficult the circumstances in which she uses her flute, I never doubt its value to her. She sacrificed too much for the instrument for me ever to doubt its preciousness to her.

For the same reason we believers must never doubt our preciousness to God, even in the face of difficulty. God may need to use us in trying circumstances, but he sacrificed too much for us not to care about us now.

JOURNAL Kathy used her instrument in difficult circumstances to carry out her will. In your difficult circumstances that you listed above, how is God using you? Can we always know the divine purpose for our earthly difficulties? What do we know that God has sacrificed for us that assures us of his care, even when we don't know the purpose of our difficulties (see verse 32)?

JOURNAL How does Kathy's attachment to her flute picture God's feelings about you? Write a prayer expressing your assurance of God's love and your thanks to him for this enduring love. Take time to offer it to the Lord.

Love Greater than Satan's Assaults

READ I do not believe I have seen the forces of evil more vividly than during my last year of seminary. For my senior sermon to the student body I preached from Matthew 6:25-34 on our heavenly Father's abiding care. What I needed to learn did not occur to me until I was almost done preaching my sermon.

The words came easily until I realized the faith it took to receive them. As I looked out over my classmates I noticed that I did not have a single close friend who had not faced a major life crisis during his years in seminary. That reality hit me like an electric jolt. I thought, "Someone doesn't want us here. Someone doesn't want us to go from this place to share the gospel." Suddenly I realized I had been blind to the spiritual warfare that had been going on all about me.

As much a reality for the apostle Paul as the challenges of the physical world are the spiritual forces around us that war against our faith. Because Paul knows the forces of evil are real, he takes great care to assure us the love of Jesus is always greater than Satan's assaults.

STUDY Read Romans 8:38-39. In this litany of realities which cannot separate us from the love of God, what words refer to the supernatural realities?

DISCUSS Have there been times in your life when you believe that you have experienced supernaturally caused adversity?

Read Ephesians 6:10-13 and 1 Peter 5:8-9. These verses affirm the reality of supernatural evil. How does God intend us to respond to it (see James 4:7)?

STUDY In Romans 8:38-39, what does Paul say we should believe about the threat of supernatural adversity? In particular, what does he say will never be in jeopardy?

JOURNAL If you believe you are experiencing Satan's assaults, using these biblical passages and promises above, write a response to a young Christian who thinks that Satan has come between him and God's love. Claim God's assurance of his love that cannot be broken. In prayer entrust yourself to God's abiding care.

DISCUSS Can I be assured of God's love despite difficult circumstances and Satan's assault?

Cool Down

DISCUSS Romans 8 has assured us of divine love that triumphs over past and present sin, difficult circumstances and Satanic assault. Which particular verse most effectively assures you of God's love? Share this with others in your group.

Think of hymns and songs which express the love of God. Sing the words together, praising God for your assurance of his love.

DAY 12: GODLINESS IN THE GRIP OF GRACE

*The benefits which in this life
accompany or flow from
justification, adoption and sanctification
include
assurance of God's love,
peace of conscience,
joy in the Holy Ghost,
increase of grace,
and perseverance therein to the end—
this is the grip of grace.*

Warm Up

READ In this devotional we have explored the benefits which belong to believers in this life, benefits that flow naturally and abundantly out of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The goal has been to help you identify, cherish, and appropriate God's promises to believers.

JOURNAL Take time to review what you have studied and learned. Pay special attention to your written responses.

Have you grown in your understanding of what benefits God has promised you?

Have you grown in your appreciation for these promises? Do you agree that these benefits are the most important things anybody can experience?

Have you grown in trusting these promises?

At the beginning you wrote a response to the question: What would you like to ask God to teach you or to do for you through this study? How has God answered your prayer?

Work Out

Today we will conclude by thinking about how appropriating the benefits God promises affects our life, and results in godly living.

Reassured by Our Spiritual Birth

DISCUSS In Romans 8, God tells us more than once about our spiritual birth – what he sacrificed to make us his, what he did to defend us, how precious we are to him. Find these verses and share them with each other (e.g. verses 1, 3, 16, 28, 32).

READ Believers can easily be like children who need to rest but cannot be calmed. Our circumstances, our sins, and our fears can keep our hearts in a constant state of agitation. We wonder if we are loved.

Our heavenly Father deals lovingly with us in Romans 8, calming us with the truths of his own care. To settle us and allow us to rest in his love, the Lord takes us into his arms through these words and tells us again about our spiritual birth. He says, “Oh, my child, because you were precious to me I sacrificed my Son to save you. That made you even more precious, because I paid so dearly to get you. I love you because you remind me of him. Nothing you will ever do will change my love for you.”

In the assurance God offers is the spiritual rest that can calm and rejuvenate many believer’s lives. A believer’s spiritual birth is the affirmation of God’s acceptance for all time. No scriptural truth is more important.

DISCUSS Many people struggle with self-doubt, looking for acceptance on the basis of personal performance or others’ approval. Describe what life is like for people like this.

DISCUSS How does God’s assurance of his love directly address these people’s need to perform and to gain approval?

DISCUSS Assurance of God’s love leads to spiritual rest. As concretely as you can, describe what a person’s life looks like if he or she is experiencing spiritual rest and calm (see especially verses 1 and 31).

DISCUSS How does spiritual rest prepare, strengthen and enable us to serve God (see verses 6, 15, 37)?

Accompanied by God's Presence

DISCUSS In Romans 8, God reminds us that he is with us, that nothing can separate us from his love, and that he is currently working in our behalf. Find and share with each other key verses which tell us this (e.g. verses 9, 26, 34, 38-39).

STUDY Other verses in which God assures us of his constant presence include Exodus 33:14, Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23, Hebrews 13:5, and Matthew 28:20. Read these verses together.

READ Children are often able to do what intimidates them when they are assured they will be accompanied by a parent who cares for them. God stirs his children to greater heights of holiness and service in this chapter of Romans by assuring us of the same. He gives us courage to face the trials and tasks that challenge us by assuring us his love will always be with us.

Our Lord's name is Immanuel – God with us – because that is our Lord's nature. The Immanuel principle permeates the pages of Scripture because God knows we are able to confront whatever challenges and intimidates us when we know our Father promises to be with us always. Nothing stirs us to action more than the certainty that nothing can separate us from him.

Knowing they cannot lose him, Christians can attempt amazing things for God. The greatest Christians in the workplace, in schools, in church work, or in families are those who are stirred to confront the challenges before which their hearts would faint if they did not know that their Father went with them.

DISCUSS Give some concrete examples of "greater heights of holiness and service" to which may be calling you.

DISCUSS How does the promise of God's presence enable us to do things that intimidate us?

DISCUSS How does the confidence of God's presence further enable godly living (see verses 8-9 and 35-37)?

Encouraged by Our Future

READ Growing up is very hard to do. All of us remember, when we were children, watching older children enjoy privileges that were not allowed to us because of our age. When we were assured that we too would enjoy those privileges when we reached that age, we were better able to bear our current circumstances.

God knows we, his children, need such a future assurance. Much in our world is not as we want it to be. Our weaknesses embarrass us. Trials plague us. The apparent accomplishments of others taunt us. Happiness seems as elusive as life's certainties, and contentment as tenuous as our successes. And yet, as impossible as it sounds, the apostle Paul promises believers real joy in this world that can be so maddening. His encouragement is based upon our future hope.

DISCUSS What is the nature of the future hope Paul outlines for believers in Romans 8 (see verses 17, 21, 23, 30, 32)?

DISCUSS What are some of the difficulties believers face in this life (see verses 35-36 and 38-39)?

DISCUSS Does this future hope erase the difficulties we experience now, or does it put them in perspective? In what way (consider verse 18)?

DISCUSS How does assurance of an incomparably glorious future instill patience and determination for godly living (see verses 23-25 and 37)?

JOURNAL As we have been discussing the impact of God's benefits on godly living, in what ways has God been speaking to you? Is God calling you to spiritual rest and the confidence that flows from it? Is there some advance in holiness or service to which he calls you, promising to be with you always? Is he calling you to patience with weakness or adversity, or faithfulness in service, in light of your glorious future? Write a prayer of response to him. As you are able, share your resolve with a fellow believer.

Cool Down

READ The necessity and delight of depending on the God whose strength is beyond our own was demonstrated for me on a vacation when my sons and I discovered we could play "helicopter" on the ceiling-scraping bunk beds in our cabin. The game is played when Dad lies down in the top bunk and hangs his arm over the side of the bed. Then as a child grasps that arm, Dad makes the noise of a helicopter and raises his arm to the ceiling – with child hanging on for the ride.

My older son was enjoying the game so much that his little brother had to give it a try. He grabbed onto my hand and started on the upward journey, but before his feet were six inches off the floor he yelled for me to stop.

"Daddy," he said, "you have to hold onto me. I can't hold onto you."

As I took his hand in mine to raise him skyward again, I recognized the poignancy of his predicament. My son wanted to reach heights higher than he could attain, but to do so he required his father to hold him. My child's grasp was too weak.

The spiritual condition of the heavenly Father's children is the same. We are too weak to hold onto God. He calls us to heights of holiness far beyond us. Our grasp is bound to fail if we rely on our own strength to maintain our hold on God.

The message of grace in Romans 8 is as simple as our predicament is plain. Because we cannot hang onto God, he holds onto us. He promises us his love, his Son, his Spirit, his faithfulness, and his home. Like fingers on a divine fist closing over our own hands are the promises that secure us to our God. When that grasp is closed no one and nothing in all creation is able to pry it apart again. We are lifted higher than we could ever reach. We are more secure than we could ever arrange. We are loved more than we can imagine.

When we cannot hang on, we yet abide in the grip of grace. In the grasp of our omnipotent God we find joy, peace, and strength. From these spring thanksgiving, confession, and service as we respond in gratitude, confidence, and love to the relationship God secures. God's promises annul Satan's threats and believers' fears. In divine safekeeping is the eternal comfort that generates spiritual enablement and holy zeal. Godliness thrives in the grip of grace.