

## Week Five

### Conversations with God

# ROMANS 8

#### READ

We'd be hard-pressed to find a statement in Scripture more descriptive of the human struggle than where Paul left off in last week's reading of Romans.

*For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing (Romans 7:19, TNIV).*

Paul went on from there to describe himself as a “prisoner of the law of sin at work within me” (Romans 7:23, TNIV). We know this prison. It is the prison of good intentions challenged by the reality of persistent struggle. We know what we want to do, but we don't do it. Instead, we do what we do not want to do, and the further down the path of life we get, the more we see the destructiveness of these decisions. We want freedom from this. We want the kind of freedom where ever-increasingly we choose what we already know is best for our lives and the lives of those we touch. Self-help plans may work temporarily, but we've tried these, and we consistently drop back to old patterns. Where is true and lasting liberation? In the final verse of last week's Romans reading, Paul points to Christ.

*Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:25, TNIV).*

Deliverance. Liberation. Freedom.

It is this freedom Paul now expounds in Romans 8 and in so doing puts grace on display with some of the most stunning statements in all of Scripture. Consider the chapter's opening:

*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:1-2, TNIV).*

Did you hear it? In Christ there is “no condemnation” and we are “free from the law of sin and death.” Meditation on these two thoughts alone will change one's life.

And it will also raise important questions. Among other things, Romans 8 addresses three questions:

How do we experience this freedom?  
Does this freedom mean we will not sin?  
What about life's hardships?

The following brief thoughts around these questions will help make the most of your reading.

#### **How do we experience this freedom?**

As you read Romans 8, carry with you the previously mentioned distinction between simple and complex aspects of common technology today. The telephone, microwave, and radio are simultaneously simple and complex. The complexity is seen in their engineering; the simplicity is seen in their use. In Romans 8, Paul addresses the work of Christ and the power of the Spirit. Clarity is gained on how this all works, but full understanding may still elude us. Most important to our

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experience is not full understanding of how the Spirit of God empowers us, but a reminder of how this letter began: “*The righteous will live by faith*” (Romans 1:17). How do we experience the liberating power of the Spirit of God? Through the simple mechanism of trust. We entrust ourselves to God. By Christ, then, “*there is now no condemnation*” (Romans 8:1), and by the Spirit, then, we are “*set free from the law of sin and death*” (Romans 8:2). In other words, as we entrust ourselves to God, we will experience new power and new strength to set our “*minds on what the Spirit desires*” (Romans 8:5). These thoughts lead us to our second question.

### **Does this mean we will not sin?**

If the liberating power of the Spirit meant immediate perfection for all Christ followers, Paul would not be writing this letter or offering this teaching. It would not be necessary. He makes the purpose of his exhortations on the Spirit known when he states that it is “*by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body*” (Romans 8:13). That is to say, the very purpose of this discussion is to remind the church in Rome that the liberating power of the Spirit is available for the ongoing battle with sin because this battle still rages, and not because it’s over. Yes, the battle is over in that the decisive blow has been delivered by Christ, but the battle is not over because the implications of Christ’s decisive blow have yet to be fully applied in our lives and in this world. Which leads to the third question.

### **What about life’s hardships?**

Life is filled with struggle. When a person commits his or her life to Christ, one might expect that struggle would cease. If “*we have peace with God*” (Romans 5:1), would God not see to it that our lives are filled with good and pleasurable experiences? Many often propose such teaching, but it is a misrepresentation of both Scripture and reality. It is in this chapter that Paul gives some of the more important thoughts to inspire perseverance in our journeys. Currently, we have “*the firstfruits of the Spirit*” (Romans 8:23). In other words, because the Spirit of God is present in our lives, we experience an initial harvest of good fruit from his presence. The harvest is not complete, though; so it is while we experience this initial harvest that we “*wait eagerly for our adoption, the redemption of our bodies*” (Romans 8:23, TNIV). This is our hope, and we “*wait for it patiently*” (Romans 8:25, TNIV). With that noted, then, how do we deal with life’s hardships? What do we do with the fact that challenges come our way, sometimes very substantial challenges, and at times these challenges are even a direct result of our following Christ? It is here where we hear some of the most inspiring language in all of Scripture regarding God’s loving and powerful oversight to all that happens in our lives. God is not idly sitting back waiting for the culmination of time. He is actively at work in all things, laboring “*for the good of those who love him*” (Romans 8:28, TNIV).

As you read Romans 8 this week, talk to God about your experience of freedom and your experience of hardship. How do you engage the Spirit of God? How do you process hardship and struggle? As you have this conversation with God, consider carefully his words through Romans 8 and how they might strengthen your understanding of this week’s imperative, *walk by the Spirit*. Much can be gained by meditating on these profound thoughts that have inspired followers of Christ from generation to generation for thousands of years.

## **MEMORIZE**

This week’s memory verses:

**Galatians 5:25**, “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”

**John 15:4-5**, “Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are

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the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

## MEDITATE

Meditating is simply talking and listening to God. Your conversation with God will be inspired and informed by reading and memorizing Scripture, but your conversation should also be personalized. Carefully consider the passages, but don't *just* consider the passage. Talk and listen. Pour out your thoughts, concerns, frustrations, and joys. Or just sit in silence before God. Some talk best with God in a quiet room. Others prefer to talk with God while running or walking. Most importantly, engage God in a way that is authentic and personal.

Use the space below to record memorable thoughts or highlights from your conversations with God to share with your Small Group or Running Partners.



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