

Session 9: No Condemnation

Romans 8 · Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers the answer to chapter 7's cry: the indwelling Spirit, who sets free from the law of sin and death, fulfills the law's just requirement in us, makes us sons who cry Abba, prays in our weakness, and guarantees that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ. Chapter 8 is the war of chapter 7 with the missing Person present.

Catholic Touchstone. Divine adoption is the heart of Catholic teaching on grace: "Grace is a participation in the life of God" that makes us sons in the Son (CCC 1997). And the chapter's assurance is Catholic assurance: unshakable confidence in God (nothing can separate us) held together with the chapter's own conditions ("if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body," 8:13), which is the virtue of hope standing between the two sins against it, despair and presumption (CCC 2091-2092).

What You Need to Know

Structure the chapter in four movements before you lead it. Movement one, the Spirit of life (8:1-13): "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (8:1), because "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death" (8:2): chapter 7's captivity, answered. Watch verse 4 closely; it resolves a thread five weeks old: God condemned sin in the flesh "in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." Fulfilled in us, not merely credited to us: 3:31's promise that faith upholds the law finds its strongest landing here. And the count your group kept last week pays off: the Spirit, absent through the whole war of 7:7-25, is named in this chapter more than in any other chapter Paul wrote.

Movement two, adoption (8:14-17): led by the Spirit, we are sons; we "received the spirit of sonship" and cry "Abba! Father!", the Spirit himself bearing witness that we are children, "and if children, then heirs... fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him" (8:15-17). Do not soften the proviso; it is load-bearing. Movement three, groaning and glory (8:18-30): creation groans, we groan, and "the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" (8:26): prayer for the days prayer fails. Then the promise that "in everything God works for good with those who love him" (8:28) and the golden chain: foreknew, predestined, called, justified, glorified (8:29-30). On predestination, give your group the Church's actual position, which is calmer than either anxiety or the internet: God truly predestines the elect to glory, and his eternal plan "includes in it each person's free response to his grace" (CCC 600); how sovereignty and freedom mesh beneath that line, the Church has deliberately left open, and her greatest schools disagree in peace. Movement four, the triumph (8:31-39): "If God is for us, who is against us?" (8:31), the Father who "did not spare his own Son" (8:32, an Old Testament echo the group will find), and the list of powers that cannot separate us from the love of God (8:38-39).

Pastoral note: this chapter contains both the Bible's strongest comfort and, in the groaning section, its most honest account of unresolved suffering. Someone in your room is in 8:23, not 8:37. The Spirit "helps us in our weakness" and prays when we cannot (8:26): offer that as present-tense mercy, not future consolation, and leave silence where silence belongs.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Genesis 22:12, 16. "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all" (8:32) deliberately echoes the angel's words on Moriah: "you have not withheld your son, your only son" (Gen 22:12, 16). What God stopped Abraham from giving, God himself gave. Session 5's mountain returns at the letter's summit; a discovery passage, guard it.

Exodus 4:22. "Israel is my first-born son": sonship is covenant vocabulary before it is private experience. What Israel was corporately, the Spirit now works in the baptized who live in his grace, crying Abba from inside the adopted. A discovery passage; keep it back.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. BASIL THE GREAT

St. Basil, in his treatise On the Holy Spirit, teaches that through the Holy Spirit comes our restoration to paradise, our ascent to the kingdom of heaven, our return to the adoption of sons, our confidence to call God Father, and our becoming partakers of the grace of Christ. He wrote it to defend the Spirit's divinity, and his argument is tonight's chapter turned into a ladder: only God can give a share in God, and what Romans 8 shows the Spirit doing from within, adoption, indwelling, life-giving, is work no creature could do in that divine mode (creatures too intercede, but not as the heart's own life).

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY

St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, a young Carmelite who died at twenty-six, wrote in her letters that she had found her heaven on earth, since heaven is God, and God was dwelling in her soul. Her whole spirituality is Romans 8:9-11 taken with complete seriousness: if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus really dwells in you, then the interior life is not self-improvement but hospitality, learning to live with the Guest already in residence. She teaches, in substance, that recollection is simply attending to who is there.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

St. John Chrysostom, preaching on the end of this chapter, teaches in substance that Paul's list of things that cannot separate us (8:38-39) is the anatomy of a lover's defiance: Paul names every terror, death, life, angels, powers, and dismisses each not because they are small but because the love of Christ is fixed, and a soul fixed on that love, says St. John Chrysostom, would choose it over heaven itself if the choice were forced. Assurance, for St. John Chrysostom, is not a doctrine about ourselves; it is a fact about Christ's grip.

Catechism Connection

CCC 1997 with 2777. "Grace is a participation in the life of God. It introduces us into the intimacy of Trinitarian life": by Baptism the Christian shares in the grace of Christ and "can call God 'Father'" (1997). The Our Father catechesis (2777) marvels at the boldness (Abba) this adoption licenses: the liturgy itself says "we dare to say."

CCC 600. The predestination sentence to memorize for your group's peace: to God all moments are present, and when he establishes his eternal plan of predestination, "he includes in it each person's free response to his grace." The golden chain and human freedom, held in one clause.

CCC 2091-2092. The two sins against hope: despair (giving up on God's mercy) and presumption (counting on it without conversion). Tonight's steelman lives exactly between these paragraphs.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

The law upheld: RESOLVES tonight. 3:31 planted it, 7:12 defended the law, 8:4 lands it: the just requirement fulfilled in us by the Spirit. Name the five-week arc once, plainly; it is a rehearsal for Session 15.

Moriah returns. 8:32 pays off Session 5's Genesis 22. Let the group make the connection in the discovery; do not front-run it.

Suffering chain deepens. 5:3-5 (hope through suffering) matures into 8:17-30 (heirs provided we suffer; groaning; all things worked for good). One connecting sentence, no lecture.

Assurance tension: OPENS tonight. The steelman raises eternal security; the full answer needs 11:22 (Session 11). Answer honestly tonight from chapter 8's own conditions, and explicitly promise the olive tree.

Session Goals

1. The group can connect 8:1-4 to chapter 7 as answer to cry, and to 3:31 as fulfillment of the law-upheld promise.
2. The group discovers Genesis 22 behind 8:32 and Exodus 4:22 behind sonship, and can explain adoption as participation, not metaphor.
3. The group can state the Church's teaching on predestination in one sentence (CCC 600) and name the two sins against hope.
4. The group can hold 8:38-39 (nothing separates) and 8:13 (if you live according to the flesh you will die) in one faith without dissolving either.

Timed Plan (75-90 minutes)

- Opening prayer and Win questions: 12 min
- Build questions 1-2 (Spirit of life; the Exodus discovery): 25 min
- Build questions 3-4 (groaning, golden chain; the Genesis 22 discovery): 23 min
- Steelman chain: 15 min
- Send questions, Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer: 15 min

If time runs short, pre-chosen cuts: drop the Dig Deeper box, and compress the creation-groaning discussion (8:19-22) to one sentence of your own. Never cut the discoveries, the predestination clarity, or the steelman answer.

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Romans 8 · Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Abba, Father: we can say that word because your Spirit says it in us. Tonight, open the chapter your children run to in the dark. Convince us of what cannot be lost, warn us of what must not be presumed, and pray in us, Spirit of God, deeper than our words can go. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

1. What is the safest you have ever felt, and what made the safety real rather than imagined?
2. When words fail you in prayer, what do you do? Be honest: give up, push through, sit silent?

Build

Read Romans 8:1-13 aloud.

1. Last week the Spirit was absent from the whole war. Count his appearances in these thirteen verses. Then look at 8:2-4: what has the Spirit done about chapter 7's captivity, and where is the law's just requirement now fulfilled?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The Spirit saturates the passage (most counts find him in nearly every verse from 8:2 onward; the chapter names him more than any other in the letter). And the reversal is total: chapter 7 ended "captive to the law of sin" (7:23); chapter 8 opens "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death" (8:2). Then the thread five weeks old resolves: God condemned sin in the flesh "in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk... according to the Spirit" (8:4). In us. Paul promised in 3:31 that this faith would uphold the law, and here is how: not by lowering the standard, and not by a standing credited while we remain unchanged, but by the Spirit producing in us what the written code could only demand. The law was an X-ray (3:20); the Spirit is the healing.

2. Verses 12-13 issue tonight's sober sentence: "if you live according to the flesh you will die." Who is Paul warning, and how do the warned "live" instead? Hold this verse; the steelman will need it.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

He is warning "brethren" (8:12): baptized, Spirit-indwelt Christians, the same people who have no condemnation (8:1). The warning is therefore real and the danger is real: grace can be abandoned. And the alternative is not white-knuckled willpower, which chapter 7 buried, but Spirit-powered warfare: "if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live" (8:13). Note the grammar of cooperation: you put to death, by the Spirit. Grace does not replace our agency; it powers it. This one verse is the Catholic doctrine of perseverance in miniature: confidence, condition, and cooperation in a single sentence.

Read Romans 8:14-17 aloud.

Discovery moment. Say: "'Sonship' was not invented for private religious feelings; it is covenant language with a history. At the burning bush's aftermath, God gives Moses a message for Pharaoh containing the Old Testament's first great sonship claim. Find it in Exodus 4."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Exodus 4:22: "Israel is my first-born son." Sonship was Israel's corporate identity and vocation. Now watch what the Spirit does with it: "you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (8:15-16). What Israel was by covenant declaration, the baptized are by indwelling: the Son's own cry (Abba, Mark 14:36) placed in our mouths by the Son's own Spirit. This is why the Church insists adoption is participation, not metaphor: "Grace is a participation in the life of God" (CCC 1997). And read the inheritance clause honestly: "heirs... fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him" (8:17). The family resemblance includes the cross.

Read Romans 8:18-30 aloud, gently; this is the groaning section.

3. Three groanings: creation's (8:22), ours (8:23), and the Spirit's (8:26). What is each waiting for, and what does 8:26 offer the person who cannot pray right now? Then read the golden chain (8:29-30): what is it for, comfort or calculation?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Creation groans for its own liberation, subjected to futility, traditionally connected with Adam's fall, and promised freedom in our glory (8:20-21); we groan for "the redemption of our bodies" (8:23), resurrection, not escape; and "the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" (8:26): on the days prayer fails, the Spirit is still sustaining prayer in you, at a depth below language, however the mystery works, and it is heard (8:27). Then 8:28-30: "in everything God works for good with those who love him," grounded in the unbroken chain: foreknew, predestined, called, justified, glorified. Read the chain as Paul wrote it: comfort for sufferers, proof that the God who began this intends to finish it, glorification stated with such certainty it appears in the past tense. What the chain is not: a tool for calculating who is in or out, ours or anyone's. The Church's one-sentence rule holds sovereignty and freedom together: God's eternal plan of predestination "includes in it each person's free response to his grace" (CCC 600). How, precisely, the Church has left open, and her greatest theologians disagree in peace; anyone who claims to have the mechanism has claimed more than the Church does.

Read Romans 8:31-39 aloud, and read it like the victory hymn it is.

Discovery moment. Say: "'He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all' (8:32). That phrase, not spared, his own son, is an echo. We stood on this mountain in Session 5. Find the angel's words to Abraham in Genesis 22."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Genesis 22:12 and 16: "you have not withheld your son, your only son." On Moriah, God stopped the knife and provided the ram; at Calvary, no voice called stop, and God provided himself. What he spared Abraham, the Father did not spare his own Son, who freely gave himself (Gal 2:20). Paul's a-fortiori lands with all its weight: the Father who gave that will not withhold any lesser grace ordered to our salvation

(8:32). Then the courtroom empties: who shall bring a charge, when God justifies? Who condemns, when Christ died, rose, and intercedes (8:33-34)? And the list (8:38-39): death, life, angels, principalities, present, future, powers, height, depth, "nor anything else in all creation." Have someone note what every item shares: they are all external. Nothing outside you can pry you from this love. Whether one's own will can walk away (8:13) is the question the list does not settle, which is exactly where the steelman begins.

Steelman: Once Saved, Always Saved?

Build it at full strength. Say to the group: "Here is the eternal-security reading, and tonight's chapter is its fortress, so build it strong. The golden chain has no leaks: all whom he justified he also glorified (8:30); if one justified person were finally lost, the chain lies. Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God (8:39), and you, being a creature, are part of creation. Add John 10:28, 'no one shall snatch them out of my hand,' and the case seems closed: a truly saved person cannot be finally lost, and to deny it is to doubt either God's grip or Christ's finished work. What could be more secure than 'nothing can separate us'?" Let its comfort fill the room; it is meant to. Then press, with one discovery.

Discovery moment (inside the steelman). Say: "Before we answer from Romans, hear Paul on Paul. Find 1 Corinthians 9:26-27, where the apostle describes how he treats his own body and why, and read it aloud."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

1 Corinthians 9:27: "I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified." The apostle of assurance did not consider himself beyond disqualification on the plain sense, though Reformed readers hear a hypothetical spur; and hear their strongest frame too: warnings as God's appointed means of preserving the elect. Grant its elegance, and it still concedes what matters pastorally: a preserving warning must warn of something real for its hearer (1 Cor 10:12). Now answer from tonight's chapter itself, which carries its own conditions: "if you live according to the flesh you will die" spoken to brethren (8:12-13); heirs "provided we suffer with him" (8:17). And examine the great list again: every item is external to you; your own will is not on it, because the love of God is not a cage. The Catholic reading takes every comfort at full strength: God will never leave, nothing can snatch, the chain is God's unbreakable intention, and the baptized may live in real confidence, not anxiety. What it refuses is the inversion that turns God's faithfulness into my unconditional guarantee regardless of persisting in grave sin: that is presumption, one of the two sins against hope (CCC 2092), as despair is the other (2091). Hope walks between them: sure of God, watchful of self, "by the Spirit" putting to death what kills (8:13). Promise the group honestly: Paul himself will say the sharp version in two weeks, to Gentile believers, in an image involving branches; hold the question open until the olive tree.

DIG DEEPER

Abba. Paul keeps the Aramaic (8:15) because the sound itself is the doctrine: it is Jesus' own address to his Father in Gethsemane (Mk 14:36), the intimate family word, preserved untranslated in Greek-speaking churches because the first Christians understood that the Spirit was not teaching them a concept but placing them inside a relationship. When the liturgy says "we dare to say" before the Our Father, it is guarding the shock (CCC 2777): creatures addressing the Creator with the Son's own word, and being right to.

Send

1. Which do you actually need tonight: the chapter's comfort (nothing can separate you) or its charge (by the Spirit, put it to death)? Why that one?
2. Where in your life is groaning the honest prayer right now, and what would it mean to trust the Spirit's sighs to carry it?

Live It This Week

- Pray one Our Father each day slowly, stopping at the first word: let the Spirit's Abba (8:15) be the whole prayer if it needs to be.
- Name the one "deed of the body" most needing death right now, and each day this week ask the Spirit, explicitly, for the power of 8:13; take one concrete step alongside the asking.
- Write Romans 8:38-39 somewhere you will meet it on a hard day, and give a copy to one person who needs it this week.

Memory Verse

"For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Romans 8:38-39 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Spirit of the living God, you have made your home in us: cry Abba where our words fail, put to death what we cannot kill, and hold us past our own grip. Father, you did not spare your own Son; we believe you will withhold nothing. Keep us in the love from which nothing can separate, until groaning turns to glory. Amen.

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Leader Reference Card · Every Passage, In Order

- Romans 8:1-13 (read aloud: no condemnation; the Spirit of life; 8:4 fulfills the 3:31 thread; the 8:13 condition)
- Romans 8:14-17 (read aloud: sonship, Abba, heirs provided we suffer)
- Exodus 4:22 (discovery passage: Israel my first-born son; do not reveal in advance; cf. Mk 14:36)
- Romans 8:18-30 (read gently: three groanings; Spirit's intercession; 8:28; the golden chain)
- Romans 8:31-39 (read as victory hymn: not spared his own Son; the unseparable love)
- Genesis 22:12, 16 (discovery passage: not withheld your son; do not reveal in advance)
- 1 Corinthians 9:26-27 (steelman discovery: lest I myself be disqualified; do not reveal in advance)
- CCC 1997, 2777, 600, 2091-2092 (Catechism Connection)
- Memory verse: Romans 8:38-39