

Dear Ladies,

I have to admit that this is probably the most difficult wrap-up to a lesson I have ever had to type. Romans 8 is filled with such profound truths that I struggle to compete. I feel like I am being asked to touch God's glory, and this makes me feel horribly inadequate.

Simply reading again verses 38-39 can bring tears to my eyes because while I know the truth of the words, I am ill-prepared to grasp the depth of God's love for me. Paul says "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height, nor depth, nor anything else in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God" NOTHING!!!!

God loves so completely that nothing can get in the way of that. A sovereign omnipotent God, who foreknew all the faults I would ever have loves all of me. Who am I that God would know all about me and still choose to order my steps? More importantly, how do I begin to honor that love?

Once I grasp that magnanimous truth, what do I do with it? I know that I need to pass it on. I cannot tuck this in my heart for future comfort. I have to allow these words to become the essence of my Christian walk. For until I do, I can never claim the truth in verse 28 that all things work for the good of those who love Him and have been called according to his purpose. Can you imagine hearing those words as an unbeliever? How cruel. They're burying their dead 4 year old and here we come claiming "this is for the good". Their minivan is repossessed on the day the dog gets hit by a car and that's supposed to be for the good too! Their husband walks out the door and into the arms of another woman. How about that? Where's the good in that?? Life barely makes sense to Christians on a good day how can we ever ask unbelievers to find good in days like those. We have a hard enough time struggling with heartbreak ourselves.

But then along comes Paul, with the wisdom he packed into a few dozen words in Romans 8 and things start to make sense. A loving sovereign God knows we exist, knows we struggle, knows our response is not likely to be honorable but still invites us to climb up into his lap on our darkest of days so He can bring comfort we could never deserve. It just blows me away. This is what love is supposed to look like. How amazing that it's ours for the asking. Let us never take it for granted.

Love, as always, Renee

So on to this weeks lesson

Read Romans 9

1. We get a sense of sadness in this chapter. Why do you think Paul's heart was so broken?

2. Do you think Paul was serious when he says he wished he were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of his brothers? Why or why not?

3. What might God be asking of you on the behalf of unbelievers?
4. Who is Paul referring to when he says in verse 6 "not all who descended from Israel are Israel"?
5. What do you recall about Jacob and Esau and the nations they birthed? What are these countries called today?
6. What lesson is there for us in verses 14-16?
7. In verses 17-18 Paul echoes Moses' words to Pharaoh. What do these words tell us about who God uses to accomplish His purpose?
8. How might God be wanting to mold you ?
9. Paul quotes Isaiah and Hosea in reference to a protected remnant. What do these words teach us about the New Testament remnant?
10. How was Jesus a stumbling block to the Jews and how does he remain a stumbling block to those who don't know him today?

For personal growth:

We sometimes forget what Paul went through. By the time he penned these words he was on his third missionary journey. He'd been beaten, stoned and left for dead, shipwrecked, betrayed by his fellow Jews, abandoned by friends and imprisoned more than once. He'd preached the gospel to thousands, planted churches throughout the middle east, taken the word of God to the ends of the known world and yet here he is, right back to teaching Faith 101. How many times does God give you the same message before you fully accept it? What might be keeping you from total belief? Have you surrendered your will so that God can place you on His potter's wheel? Will you allow him to mold you and shape you into something useful, even when it means you will be thrown into the fire to solidify your faith. Can you accept being a vessel of His choosing, even if it's not what you imagine for yourself?

For the good of the group:

Romans 9 is a connecting piece which links Israel's past to its future glory and as such doesn't pack the emotional punch that last week's lesson carries but there are plenty of good nuggets contained within. Is there a

command, a warning, or a promise that you gleaned from studying this chapter?