

More Than Conquerors

July 26, 2026

Romans 8:26-39

²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit comes to help our weakness. We don't know what we should pray, but the Spirit himself pleads our case with unexpressed groans. ²⁷ The one who searches hearts knows how the Spirit thinks, because he pleads for the saints, consistent with God's will. ²⁸ We know that God works all things together for good for the ones who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ We know this because God knew them in advance, and he decided in advance that they would be conformed to the image of his Son. That way his Son would be the first of many brothers and sisters.

³⁰ Those who God decided in advance would be conformed to his Son, he also called. Those whom he called, he also made righteous. Those whom he made righteous, he also glorified. ³¹ So what are we going to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He didn't spare his own Son but gave him up for us all. Won't he also freely give us all things with him? ³³ Who will bring a charge against God's elect people? It is God who acquits them. ³⁴ Who is going to convict them? It is Christ Jesus who died, even more, who was raised, and who also is at God's right side. It is Christ Jesus who also pleads our case for us.

³⁵ Who will separate us from Christ's love? Will we be separated by trouble, or distress, or harassment, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, 'We are being put to death all day long for your sake. We are treated like sheep for slaughter.'

³⁷ But in all these things we win a sweeping victory through the one who loved us. ³⁸ I'm convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers ³⁹ or height or depth, or any other thing that is created.



The essence of this week's passage can be summed up in five-ish words: We're all in this together. This includes God. God is in this with us. God's never-failing love is in this with us. The Spirit is with us, even when we don't have words for what *this* is. We are not alone. We are all in this together. Central to Paul's understanding of faith itself and of the living out of our faith is community. But community is hard. It requires vulnerability and commitment, mutual support, and the building of trust. To build true community takes effort. And if we're being honest, more than once in the process of building community, we ask ourselves: is this worth it? Is what is required of me to be vulnerable with others and to work through their struggles and my struggles worth the effort?

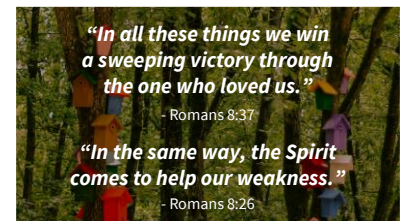
The foundation of Christian community is God's unfailing, unbreakable love. This is what makes community even possible. This is what sustains and inspires Christian community. It is so because through God's never-ending, never-failing love we are more than conquerors. Through God's love we can have victory over all the ways that sin rises up to tear us down, to pit us against one another, to make us question if community is worth it. As we prepare to delve into our passage for today and to wrestle with the ways that God empowers and sustains us, let us pray...

Gracious God, we do not know how to worship as we should. But you are in every moment and in every place; and your Spirit in us helps us worship even now. Open the eyes of our hearts to be mindful of your presence and to allow you to live fully and powerfully in us, by the Spirit of Christ. And now, O God, I ask that you would bless the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts. You are our rock and our redeemer, our Christ and our king. Amen.

As we look at today's passage as a whole, two main themes emerge. The first is summarized in verse 37. Here we read, *"In all these things we win a sweeping victory through the one who loved us."* In all these things – our battle with temptation and sin, our fear of death and illness, our tendency towards pleasuring and elevating self, our current society marked by division and power over others – in all these things we can win a *"sweeping victory"* through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This is not a victory that comes and goes. It is not a victory that is sometimes with us. No, through Christ we are assured that the victory over the things of this world will be complete, final, total.

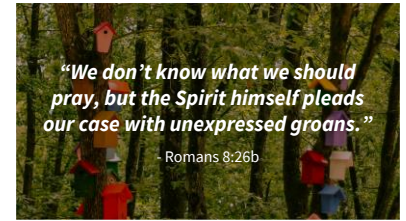


The second theme that clearly emerges is summarized in verse 26, where we read, *"In the same way, the Spirit comes to help our weakness."* These connecting words, *"in the same way,"* are reaching back to Paul's thoughts in verses 24 and 25, where Paul reminds us that we wait in hope and with patience for the redemption of our bodies and of this world. We do not wait alone or in small, secluded groups. No, we wait as the community of faith, empowered by the sure presence of the Holy Spirit, the one who guarantees our eternal inheritance.



Waiting with hope and patience, often in breathless anticipation, we walk in faith together. Starting in verse 26, Paul understands this process as a corporate experience. In verse 26 it is *"our"* weakness. As we proceed, Paul continues to use pluralistic, communal terms. *"We"* is used frequently, as is *"our."* It is *"we"* that do not know how to pray. It is *"our case"* and it is *"for the saints"* and *"for those who love God."* The crux of our need for the Spirit's presence and guidance and God's solutions for our needs is found in the rest of verse 26.

Here Paul writes, *“We don’t know what we should pray, but the Spirit himself pleads our case with unexpressed groans.”* Yes, there are times when we think we know what to pray for. A loved one is sick, so we pray for healing. We can’t find a job, so we pray for God to open a door. In some of these cases, when we think we know what to pray for, sometimes we are misguided by our human wants. Maybe we don’t always pray in alignment with God’s plans and purposes for our lives and our world. And then there are times when we know that we should be praying but don’t know what to pray for or cannot come up with the words to bring before God. In all of these cases, we know that the Spirit jumps in and prays for us, sometimes in groans that only the Spirit and God can understand.



As we read Paul’s words in verse 27, we are reminded why we can count on the Holy Spirit in the ways that we are lifted in prayer to God. In this verse we read, *“The one who searches hearts knows how the Spirit thinks, because he pleads for the saints, consistent with God’s will.”* There is an alignment between God and the Spirit. This is part of the three-in-one form of the trinity. The Spirit prays for us – pleads our case – in alignment with or consistent with God’s will for our lives. This is also where grace enters the Spirit’s prayers for the saints.

God’s grace covers and guides and directs the prayers that surround us. The same grace that saves us when we are sinful, that forgives us when we do not deserve it, that loves us when we are acting unlovable – that same grace prays for us when we can’t find the words and when we pray prayers that are not consistent with God’s will. God-in-Spirit is not some far-off deity for whom we need to work hard to get their attention. God is within us. God knows us even better than we know ourselves. In all cases, the Spirit pleads our case as we, the faithful, are lifted up before the Lord our God.

These ideas are reinforced by verse 28. In this verse we are reminded that God has good plans and purposes for those who love God. Paul puts it this way: *“We know that God works all things together for good for the ones who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose.”* Here we again return to the corporate aspect of our faith. God is working my life and your life, my purposes and your purposes, all together for a greater good. God and the Spirit look far beyond the selfish tendencies that we have to consider the larger good in our lives and in our world.

In our United Methodist understanding of our purpose in the world, the communal, greater good is found in our mission statement: “To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” This mission calls us to work together towards the restoration and redemption of all things. As people called United Methodists, we know that the good news of Jesus Christ has the power to change hearts and lives. It is our communal task to share this good news, trusting in the power of God to make people into new creations.

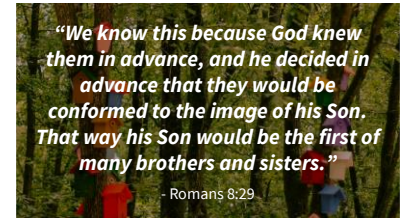


Mission leads to vision. So, here is the vision statement for our larger United Methodist church: “The United Methodist Church forms disciples of Jesus Christ who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously in local communities and worldwide connections.” This is the “how” and the “why” to the “what” of our mission. Two years ago, at Annual Conference, loving boldly was the overarching theme. This past June, again at Annual Conference, the main theme was serving joyfully. Any guesses for 2027’s Annual Conference theme?



Together, when we live out this vision statement, when we love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously as the people of God, we are being and bringing Christ to the world.

This is our call, our purpose, the ways that we align ourselves with God's will and way. Moving into verse 29, Paul reminds us that this who and what we are supposed to be as followers of Jesus Christ.



Here he notes that God's plan has always been to conform us to the image of Christ. God "*knew in advance*" and "*decided in advance*" that we are selected to bear Christ's image to the world. This verse is often used for those who believe in predestination. But Paul is not saying here that the exact order and/or trajectory of our lives has been predetermined or predestined. Paul declares here that we have been predestined to be "*conformed to the image of his son.*" To this end, we are called so that we can become more like Christ. Paul is not saying that God has predetermined this outcome or what we'll do or what will happen to us. Paul is arguing that this is who we were created to be... that this is who God intends us to be. God's plan is for all people to be a brother or sister to Christ.

Here is where the concept of "free will" enters the discussion. I cannot decide for you that you will be conformed to the image of Christ. No one else can either. Yes, I and others can help you to make that choice and can even guide and help you in the living out of that choice. "We" can even hold one another accountable and support and encourage one another. We can model Christ to and for each other. But ultimately it is a personal choice to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, *and* it is a personal choice to live that out in the world. The call to faith is a personal call to a relationship with God and then with one another. But the life of faith is a corporate experience, one lived out in community.

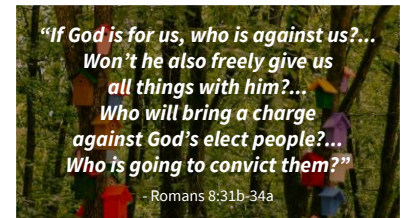
Long ago, in the second and third centuries, some believers started living in isolated communities out in the deserts, mostly in northern Africa. They were known as the “desert fathers” and “desert mothers.” They largely lived the life of a hermit. But these so-called hermits had frequent visitors – pilgrims and disciples that came out into the desert to learn from these faithful fathers and mothers. And as time progressed, these isolated individuals began to form communities out there in the desert. These are the precursors to today’s monasteries, abbeys, priories, and such. Over time, these most devout people, these desert fathers and mothers found that they needed community. They needed a sense of belonging, a feeling of support and encouragement, a way to live out their faith day by day. This is how they were created by God. This is how we are created by God. We are wired to be and live in community.

Turning to verse 30 we see the outcome or natural progression of choosing to live in a relationship with the Lord our God. When we respond to God’s call on our hearts, we begin to be conformed to the image of Christ. In Methodism, this is the process we call “justification” – being made like Christ. Being justified, we become righteous. As Christ was holy, so too we become holy. Unlike the perfect one, we do not remain here long. We mess up and fall into sin. And through God’s love and grace we are again justified, made right again in God’s eyes. Over time we become more and more like Christ, although we never obtain perfection. This, in Methodist circles, is called “sanctification” – the process of taking on the family resemblance so that others begin to see Christ in us. John Wesley called this “going on to perfection.” It is not possible in this life but it becomes our reality when we are eternally “glorified.”

Starting in verse 31 and continuing into verse 34, Paul asks a series of questions. These questions are based on the premise that we are all in the process of becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. This is reflected in the opening question in verse 31: *“So what are we going to say about these things?”* Indeed, what are we going to say about this process of being conformed to Christ, of becoming more and more a brother or sister of Jesus?

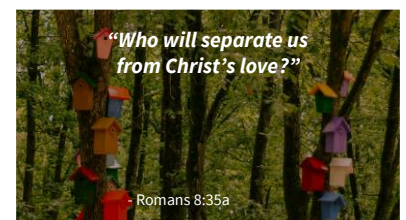
Paul answers his own question with a string of questions. He asks, *“If God is for us, who is against us?... Won’t he also freely give us all things with him?... Who will bring a charge against God’s elect*

people?... Who is going to convict them?” Paul is asking: Who has the power? His answer comes in verse 34: *“It is Christ Jesus.”* The one who died and was raised and sits at God’s right hand – that is who is for us, that is who gives us what we need, that is who defends us and pleads our case before God. It is Jesus Christ who holds the power. And this power, it is rooted and grounded in love.

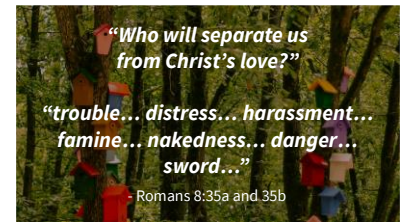


Next Paul asks what we might call a rhetorical question. It is a question that we know the answer to. Here is the question asked in verse 35: *“Who will separate us from Christ’s love?”* There are

probably a lot of things that we could offer as an answer to this question. It is so because we have all experienced things that have in fact separated us from Christ’s love. For now, in your mind, what are some personal answers to this question...?



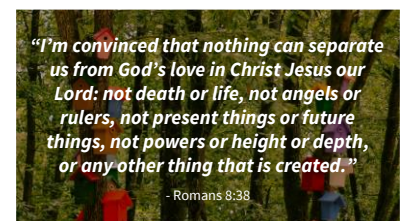
Paul follows this question with a list of things that he thinks might possibly be able to separate us from the love of God that we find in Christ: *“trouble... distress... harassment... famine... nakedness... danger... sword.”* And now I ask, what would you add to this list of things that might just be able to separate us from God’s love? These are the things you just named in your mind just a few seconds ago. Now I ask: What all could you add to the list that Paul offers us concerning things that have the potential to separate us from the love of God that we find in Christ Jesus...? If you didn’t or couldn’t share now, you’ll have a chance this week as you delve into GPS question #2.



In verse 37, Paul declares that although these things named in Paul’s list (or named or thought of in our time of reflection today) *might* be able to separate us from God’s love, in fact none have the absolute power to do so. It is so because, *“In all these things we win a sweeping victory through the one who loved us.”* A “sweeping victory.” As stated at the beginning of this time, it is a victory over the things of this world that will be complete, final, and total. A victory rooted in, grounded on, and secured by Christ’s love for you and me.



Because of this love, nothing can separate us from God or even from one another. Not our own sin, not the suffering of this world, not the troubles of this life. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. Lastly, in verse 38, Paul gives us a sweeping list concerning more of the things that *cannot* keep us from a sweeping victory. Here we read, *“I’m convinced that nothing can separate us from God’s love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers or height or depth, or any other thing that is created.”*



present things or future things, not powers or height or depth, or any other thing that is created.” Paul is convinced. We should be too.

We are not able to achieve this victory because we are the strongest, bravest, or simply the most committed. Or because we avoid the things of this world, like the desert fathers and mothers once did. In reality, one might think we’d need these things – strength, bravery, commitment – to be victorious. Now, they do help. But in and of themselves, they do not insure victory over the things of this world. My friends, victory comes because we are the most connected, the most supported, the most encouraged, the most loved people. Together, as the people of God, we simply receive the gift of victory because we are loved. For this gift and for the receiving of the gift, we say thanks be to God. Alleluia and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow.* God decided in advance to conform you to his son’s image. In what way(s) might you seek to help God this week in God’s effort to make you more like Jesus? How can we better conform to Christ’s image as we seek to live together in community?
- 2) *Pray.* The Holy Spirit prays for us in accordance with God’s will. What might the Spirit be praying about for you that you can’t quite bring to God on your own?
- 3) *Study.* Read John 16:4b-16. What does this passage add to our Romans 8:26-39 passage concerning how the Holy Spirit works in your life?