

STUDY GUIDE 10 – ‘Facing the future’

Read **Romans 8:18-39** in the dramatised script and/or in another version.

(1) What <i>comparison</i> does Paul invite us to consider? (18)	
(2) In what sense is the <i>creation groaning</i> ? What is it <i>waiting</i> for? (19-22)	
(3) Why are we too <i>groaning inwardly</i> ? (23)	
(4) What is the difference between faith and <i>hope</i> ? (24-25)	
(5) What <i>weakness</i> is Paul talking about? (26)	
(6) How does the <i>Spirit help</i> us? (26-27)	
(7) What is God’s <i>purpose</i> for our lives? (28-29a)	
(8) How is that purpose part of his overall plan for us? (29-30)	
(9) How can we be confident of God’s <i>gracious</i> love for us? (31-32)	
(10) How do we know that there is no <i>charge</i> that can <i>condemn</i> us? (33-34)	
(11) What is the worst <i>danger</i> that a Christian could face? (35-36)	
(12) Why does Paul describe us as <i>more than conquerors</i> ? (37)	
(13) Which of the ‘opposition line-up’ in 38-39 do I find most of a problem?	
(14) How much of a problem are they in reality? Why? (39)	

(A) Read the dialogue overleaf. Does this caricature fit us at any point? What has the Hypochondriac got seriously wrong?	
(B) 18-25 are all about <i>waiting</i> . In what sense is <i>the creation</i> waiting (19-22) ? And in what sense are <i>we ourselves</i> waiting (23-25) ?	
(C) Read 26-30 in another version (eg <i>The Message</i>). If God has pre-arranged every detail of our lives for our benefit, what’s the point of praying? Or isn’t that what Paul is getting at?	
(D) (<i>In smaller groups.</i>) In 31-39 the question ‘What shall we say...?’ is answered by five further questions. Discuss how each OT story illustrates the security God’s love gives us:	
<p><i>Who can be against us?</i> (31) 2 Kings 6:15-17</p> <p><i>He who did not spare his own Son...?</i> (32) Gen 22:15-18</p> <p><i>Who will bring any charge?</i> (33) Zech 3:1-4</p> <p><i>Who ... is interceding for us?</i> (34) Exod 17:8-11</p> <p><i>Shall trouble ... separate us from God’s love?</i> (35-37) Dan 3:24-25</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there one point about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) that I have understood in a new or deeper way? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there one practical step I could take as a result of studying this section of Romans? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there something in this section which I could turn into praise or prayer to God? 	

'The Hypochondriac' by Paul McCusker (adapted)¹

Like most hypochondriacs, this one is talking to himself.

- HYPO 1 My Christian therapist called me a hypochondriac this morning.
- HYPO 2 He said I suffer from an abnormal anxiety over my spiritual health.
- HYPO 1 I can't imagine what caused him to lash out at me so unfairly. I probably don't pray for him enough.
- HYPO 2 That's the problem. My prayer life, I mean. When I pray, I go through my mental checklist – my wife, my mother and father, then moving chronologically through my family, then my wife's family, then my friends and their families -
- HYPO 1 And by that time I'm so tired that I forget to pray for the peripheral people in my life, like my Christian therapist.
- HYPO 2 It makes me heartsick to think about all the people whose lives might be more closely attuned to the will of God, if only I'd prayed for them more often.
- HYPO 1 It's my fault, I know. I can't seem to concentrate when I pray.
- HYPO 2 For example, the other night I decided to finish reading the day-by-day devotional book I've been using for the past three years – containing quotes from Billy Graham, the Pope and Selwyn Hughes, among others.
- HYPO 1 Most people finish it in a year. It's taken me three years because I took four months to get to Jan 18th, then had to catch up on all the readings I'd missed.
- HYPO 2 So I decided to read it straight through like a regular book. I eventually got to Dec 31st which was by Philip Yancey on 'praying in the New Year.' Since it was the middle of June I felt a little strange doing it, but I pressed on.
- HYPO 1 *Dear Father –*
- HYPO 2 As I began to pray I thought of a song I'd heard on the radio that day. I tried to make it stop and I couldn't, even though I prayed louder in my brain. I then forced myself to relax and at least its volume got turned down. I began again.
- HYPO 1 *Dear Father –*
- HYPO 2 For no particular reason I suddenly wondered if I'd given my boss at work a file I'd promised her. As I was scribbling a note to remind myself, the song came back even louder. Is the radio a tool of Satan? Anything to stop me praying.
- HYPO 1 *Dear Father –*
- HYPO 2 I then realised that I'd forgotten to call my mother this past week. I scribbled another note.
- HYPO 1 My devotional book taunted me. I hadn't really prayed yet. I had managed 'Dear Father' and that was all. Why was I under attack like this?
- HYPO 2 Why couldn't I get my mind under control? Was my spiritual life so shallow that I couldn't even pray for a few minutes without distraction?
- HYPO 1 At this rate I really would be praying in the New Year with Philip Yancey.
- HYPO 2 *New Year.* Where were we for New Year's Eve last year? With my brother's family – or was that the year before? Did we go to church or watch a movie?
- HYPO 1 *I was supposed to be praying.* I threw the devotional book across the floor.
- HYPO 2 Wrestled and pinned to the mat of spiritual failure, I gave up and decided to 'pray in the New Year' ... sometime next year.

RIGHT THROUGH ROMANS

'Facing the future' (8:18-39)

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In *Pilgrim's Progress* the travellers come to the Interpreter's House, where they are shown a room 'where was a Man that could look no way but downwards, with a Muck-rake in his hand. There stood also one over his head with a Celestial Crown in his hand, and proffered him that Crown for his Muck-rake; but the man did neither look up, nor regard, but raked to himself the straws, the small sticks and dust of the floor.' At the climax of chs 1- 8, Paul urges the Romans and us to look, not downwards at our own messy lives, but forwards and upwards to the glorious future God has planned for his children. 'Eternal glories gleam afar,/to nerve my faint endeavour;/so now to watch, to work, to war,/and then to rest for ever.' (Hymn 'I've found a friend.')

8:18-25 The hope of a frustrated creation (a). **18** *Sufferings ... glory.* These key words are picked up from v17 so there is no break in the flow of thought. **19** *The creation.* The present physical world-order is compared to a woman about to give birth to a child; her labour pains are prolonged but she is determined not to lose her hope of a joyful outcome. One day the children of God will be revealed for what they are now in embryo (this does not contradict the promise that we are already God's sons and daughters, 8:15, Jn 1:12, Gal 4:7). **20-21** *Frustration ... bondage to decay.* The word for *frustration* (Gk *mataiotēs*) occurs in the OT book of Ecclesiastes, ('Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity,' Eccl 1:2, KJV). Just as Romans 7 is a portrait of the human being without Christ, so Ecclesiastes is a study of the created world without God, which in itself lacks ultimate purpose or meaning. Some interpreters trace this state back to the Fall, when sin and death entered God's world; but others see it as an essential feature of the old order, which was pronounced 'very good' (Gen 1:31) but will one day be replaced by the new creation (Isa 65:17; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1-4). This present imperfect world makes us long for a perfect one, as exiles long for home. **23** *Firstfruits of the Spirit.* Migrating birds find their way over thousands of miles thanks to a homing device apparently located in the front of their brains. The Spirit likewise is a kind of divine implant, guiding us homewards and training us to keep steadily on course. *Redemption* refers here not to the cross (3:24) but forward to the final release that will come at Jesus' return, when our bodies, our physical nature, will be amazingly transformed (1 Cor 15:49-57; Phil 3:20-21).

8:26-30 Prayer and God's ultimate purpose (a). **26** *Wordless groans.* Some refer this to the ecstatic utterance of tongues; but not all Christians experience that, whereas all of us know times when we long so deeply for God to do something that we can't find words for our desire, or at best we pray in broken snatches. This is another work of the Spirit to be added to those mentioned earlier (8:9-17); it is called *interceding* (or intercession) (**27**) because the Spirit is a 'go-between' bringing our feelings to God and God's encouragements to us, like a divine courier or secret agent keeping loyalists deep in enemy-occupied territory in touch with headquarters. **28** *In all things.* Not so much a promise that God will instantly solve all our difficulties (though he does answer prayers for practical help in astonishing ways), as a reassurance that even our worst moments are part of God's overall plan for our holiness. **29** *Predestined ... glorified.* He is shaping us into the family *image* (likeness) of Christ, which was always his intention (Gen 1:26-27). Our present experiences of *calling* and *justification* are sandwiched between the two infinite mysteries of *predestination* and *glory*. We may not be able to understand the mysteries, but we can gladly obey his call and rejoice in his justification. 'We live by faith, not by sight' (2 Cor 5:7).

8:31-39 The unshakeable love of God in Christ (a). **31-34** Paul uses familiar lawcourt imagery to picture believers in the dock bracing themselves to face the accusations of God and/or the devil. Instead, Jesus himself steps into the dock and says 'There is no charge against this person!' In fact, Jesus' present work is to *intercede* for us in heaven as the Spirit intercedes for us on earth. Do we draw upon these two powerful allies in prayer? **35-39** Paul brings this incredible chapter to a triumphant conclusion as he pictures all the agencies on earth or in the heavenlies lining up to destroy our faith and break our connection with God's *love*. We may often feel like *sheep destined for slaughter*, but we have a good Shepherd who will bring us safely home (Jn 10:11, 28).

¹ Paul McCusker *The Colossal Book of Quick Skits* (Oxford and Grand Rapids 2006) no 67.