

Living the Story

A Study through Scripture

Introduction:

In last week's lesson, I jokingly said that if you would read the entire New Testament, you should be ready for this week. While that may have been hyperbole, it *is* difficult to shrink down the amount of text covered this week into a manageable bite—there is just so much stuff here.

In some ways, this may be a challenge we all face when trying to communicate our faith with others. How do you describe a life of faith in just a sentence or two? While it may be difficult, we are going to try.

Specifically, we are going to look at Paul's message and find a theme he uses often. I am not sure it completely fair to say it is the only theme he writes, but I do know it is one of the key ones for him.

Summary of the Text:

Romans can be a difficult book to summarize. Each chapter is thick with meaning. Chapter 8 is no exception. Here is what I think we need to know about this chapter for our group lesson.

First, it is Jesus who brings life (8.1-4). The reason for this is that Jesus lives out the law of the Spirit, versus the law of sin and death. Commentators will spend a lot of time defining what "law" means here, and what the exact nuances of Paul's words entail. Again, in the name of summary, for us we need to understand that life in the Spirit, through Jesus, brings life. You do not find it any other way.

Second, there is a dichotomy between "Spirit Life" and "Flesh Life." If you live a fleshly life, you live by the desires of the flesh (8.5-8). If you are about a Spirit life, then you live by the Spirit (8.9-11). Galatians chapter 5 gives a fuller explanation of these two extremes. You may want to look at this both during your preparation and at some point in the group discussion. Paul says those who are Spirit minded, therefore, live a life that is Spirit filled (8.12-13).

And when you are Spirit filled, you are a child of God (8.14-17). Growing up, I had a friend who had "cool" parents. (It's not that I thought my parents were uncool, it was just that his were so much cooler. I was in 3rd grade, cut me some slack!) No matter how cool his parents were, however, I recognized they were not my parents, and so I could never call his father "Dad." Paul says when we live by the spirit, we are adopted by God and "Dad" is an appropriate response from us to him.

All of this points to the last section of this chapter, which is often subtitled: "More Than Conquerors." We are using this section as a closing exhortation, but be sure to review it prior to your group meeting. When God calls us his children, when he brings us into him, we have no reason to fear or to doubt. As Paul says, nothing can separate us from God.

My question is why do we so often live like we are separated from him? Some of Paul's harshest criticisms are reserved for those who lose their assurance of their standing before God and then try to pervert the gospel so as to overcome that which really never needed overcoming in the first place. If God loves you, why do you have to earn his love? If Christ was fully capable of redeeming you through his death, why do you need to be sure to work as if there was some gap between what Jesus did and what you need to do? We need to be reminded of the power of Romans 8 more often, I believe, so that we live it out as well.

LESSON #32

Date: 04/28/2013

Text: Romans 8

The Story: Chapter 29

The Big Picture: If you were going to summarize your faith in just one sentence, what would you say?

Materials Needed: none

Preparing for the Group Time:

Reflect on Paul's words in Romans 8. How well do you live them out? How can you better live in the reality that God has called us as his children and nothing will separate us from him? Read our closing exhortation throughout the week this week to help remind you of this reality.

Living the Story

Lesson #32
Text: Romans 8

Lesson Outline:

In the movie *City Clickers*, the character Curly (played by Jack Palance) tells those gathered with him around the camp fire, "The secret of life is ... one thing." Although he does not say it at the time, we discover that his secret to life echoes that of Søren Kierkegaard, who wrote: "purity of heart is to will one thing." It is finding the one thing that drives you, they say, that is the secret to life. If you were going to define the secret of life in a sentence, what would that sentence be?

Read Romans 8.1-17, 31-39.

Ask the discussion questions.

Close by reading Romans 8.31-39 as a closing exhortation.

Discussion Questions:

How do you think Paul would have defined the secret of life in one sentence?

If we were to change the scenario just slightly, how would you define the secret of a life of faith in just one sentence?

What do you think Paul would say if asked: "What is your message of faith summarized in a sentence?"

How well do you think chapter 8 of the book of Romans would serve as a summary of Paul's message? What would need to be added?

In what ways does the life of Paul serve as an illustration of Romans 8, especially verses 31-39?

How does your own life show that you live out Paul's words found in Romans 8?

How can you better live this out? How can this group help you do that?

Living the Story:

I am always amazed at the fact we read Romans 8.31-39, yet our lives are so often not lived like we really believe it. Knowing we are more than conquerors should cause us to live life with assurance, but do we? Your challenge this week is to determine ways you can better live a life of confidence, because you live a life full of the Spirit. Be sure to identify the ways a life lived as a conqueror looks different than a life of doubt or uncertainty.

Next Week:

The text for next week is Acts 20.1-25.12 and can be found in *The Story* chapter 30.