

# **Firm Foundations**

A black and white photograph of a city skyline, likely Shanghai, featuring several skyscrapers. One prominent building on the left is under construction, with cranes visible. The background shows a dense urban landscape with various high-rise buildings under a clear sky.

## **4 Bible Studies in Romans 8 for Chinese Returnees**

**Prepared for the Return**

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# Introduction

There are hundreds of Bible study guides out there, so you might well be wondering *'Why have a special set of Bible studies for returnees?'*

Returnees to China (those going home after a period of studying or working abroad) face a huge variety of challenges to their Christian faith. Some of these challenges are common to all Christians, while others will be unique to returnees. These Bible studies aim to help returnees to think through a number of these challenges in light of God's word, in order to equip them to stand firm in Christ when they return home. The studies will be most useful for those preparing to return soon, or those who have recently returned.

These studies have been written out of a conviction that it is God's word which best equips Christians to stand firm, rather than any special programme, which is why these studies go through a chapter of the Bible rather than a series of topics. Our hope is that your returnee friend will be encouraged and equipped to continue reading God's word on their own, rather than feeling helpless now that they are no longer able to study with you! The application questions and case studies aim to apply God's word to specific areas that are common challenges for many returnees, and there are also additional notes which deal with presuppositions that someone from a Chinese background may have about the gospel.

The studies have been designed for a group to work through; they can also be adapted for use in one-to-one Bible studies. This study pack is intended to help equip anyone leading such a study - hopefully a group members' version will be available soon! We have also recorded a number of audio interviews in which those who have already returned share their experiences. The interviews can be found at <http://www.seaturtles.org.uk/interviews/>.

## **Explanation of some of the features of this resource:**

### **◆ Purpose of the Passage**

Each study begins with a sentence entitled 'Purpose of the passage'. This is a summary of the main point of the passage and the effect it is intended to have on the reader, both for the Christians in Rome who originally read the letter, and for us today. This should help the study to remain focussed on the main point, and perhaps explain what some of the questions are getting at.

### **◆ Answers**

Some of the questions have answers; others don't! Where answers are provided they are just a guide, not a full answer. To help your understanding and personal study of Romans you may find it useful to consult other resources, such as 'Read Mark Learn: Romans', which you should be able to get hold of through Amazon.

### **◆ Before the Study...**

At the start of each study is a box with questions for group members to think through in advance. This will help the whole group to get more out of the study and encourage them to read the Bible on their own.

### **◆ 'Big Questions'**

Some studies have a 'Big Question' (usually quite difficult) followed by several easier questions which help the group answer the big question. It can be helpful to write out the big question, enabling the group to see which direction the smaller questions are going in.

### **◆ 'By the Way...'**

People from different cultures often react differently to hearing the same thing! These studies include several asides entitled 'By the way...' which briefly introduce how someone from a Chinese culture may view some of the key concepts in Romans 8. They also suggest how we might explain these concepts in a way that resonates with Chinese ways of thinking, and avoids misunderstanding.

## ◆ Visual Aids

Visual aids can be particularly useful if the group is studying in their second language. Suggestions for visual aids such as tables and diagrams are given throughout.

## ◆ Bible Reading 'Tools'

A number of 'tools' are mentioned throughout the studies: these are different ways of discovering the meaning of a Bible passage. The aim is to help returnees learn to read God's word for themselves by equipping them with some general principles about how to understand the Bible. Perhaps you could make a little toolkit as a visual aid! Here is a brief explanation of the different tools used in this study guide:

### **Two primary tools:**

These can be used with any and every passage!

AUTHOR'S PURPOSE TOOL: *Why did the author write this passage of the Bible? How does this passage help me understand why the author wrote the whole book?*

'SO WHAT?' TOOL: *How should this passage change my life - the way I think and the way I act?*

### **Other useful tools:**

LINKING WORDS TOOL: (Study 1) *How do words like 'therefore', 'because', 'for' etc help us understand the flow of the logic in the passage?*

CONTEXT TOOL: (Study 1) *How is my understanding of this passage/verse helped by seeing how it fits within the rest of the book?*

REPETITION TOOL: (Study 2) *What words and ideas are repeated in this passage?*

TONE AND FEEL TOOL: (Study 4) *How does the author make his point? How does the passage make us feel?*

QUOTATION/ALLUSION TOOL: (Study 4) *When the author quotes or alludes to another part of the Bible, we should consider how the original context of the quotation helps us understand.*

(read 'Dig Deeper' by Nigel Beynon and Andrew Sach (IVP 2005) and 'Dig Even Deeper' by Andrew Sach and Richard Alldritt (IVP 2011) for a fuller explanation and for more tools)

## **'Firm Foundations'**

Paul wrote the book of Romans to help Christians in Rome be very confident in the gospel. Romans 8 is a wonderful high-point in the letter, where Paul sums up why they should have such confidence *even though* they battle with sin and suffering: he points them backwards to the cross, inwards to the work of the Holy Spirit, and forwards to future glory.

Chinese returnees will go through many changes and challenges as they settle into life as a Christian back home. These things may cause them to question and doubt their faith, so it is particularly important that their confidence in the gospel is unshakeable. Each of the four studies includes one 'Firm Foundation': a wonderful fact that is true for all Christians, and which gives us great confidence. We can know that if we build our lives on these truths they will help to keep our Christian faith strong even when we go through change and difficulty.

To help you think through what this might look like in practice, each study includes an email from 'Q', an imaginary returnee.\* Sadly, many of our returnee friends will face similar challenges to Q. As you seek together to apply the truths of the 'Firm Foundations' to these imaginary situations, it will help prepare returnees to consider how they should live and think in light of these truths themselves when they face similar situations back home. Discussing these issues as an imaginary scenario can make it easier to cover potentially sensitive areas.

To emphasise these 'Firm Foundations' you could print them on little cards and give one to group members each week, encouraging them to keep it somewhere visible and continue reflecting on how this truth will impact their everyday thinking and living.

\* As you will notice, some of the words in these emails are a bit strange! One of the issues to discuss with returnees is to what extent they need to be slightly careful about what they say in emails. Given that monitoring of emails is likely in the first place to be done with computer software, it makes sense to avoid certain words that are likely to draw unwanted attention (e.g. church, mission, evangelism, Jesus etc). Hopefully these imaginary emails will give you a few ideas of how to communicate these things. Different returnees are going to back to different situations, so it's important you discuss your email protocol with each individual, since some will be happier to write more openly than others. Without wanting to breed unnecessary fear, it's generally worth erring on the more cautious side of things, while not being paralysed from communicating with each other. The same applies to phone and Skype calls. We are bound to all make mistakes, but there is no need to panic for we know that the LORD is on the throne!

# Romans 8:1-4

**Purpose of the Passage:** Have confidence: those in Christ cannot be condemned because they've been declared righteous by Christ's death

## 1. Starter Questions:

a) Imagine yourself in 10 years' time. In the next 10 years, what things might prevent you standing firm as a Christian?

*E.g.: Pressure from friends and family*

*Struggling to find a church back in China, or have time to go to church*

*Temptation to live for worldly success, not for Jesus*

b) For what reasons have you sometimes felt condemned? (by God or by people)

## 2. Big Question: Why is there no condemnation for Christians?

◆ LINKING WORDS TOOL:

a) Highlight linking words (e.g. 'for', 'therefore', 'so that').

b) How do these help us answer the Big Question?

- v1 'Therefore' points us back to the whole of Romans 1-7!

- v2 'For' the Spirit of life has set us free from the law of sin and death

- v3 'For' God has done what the law could not do: condemning sin in Jesus so that the law's righteous requirement would be fulfilled in us.

This gives us some answers, but it seems a bit confusing. We need some context from Romans 1-7!

◆ CONTEXT TOOL:

You could split into three groups and discuss one question each.

a) Why did we need to be set free from sin and death?

See Romans 1:18, 2:5, 3:10-18, 6:23

- *God is angry at man's ungodliness and unrighteousness (= rejecting God). Our relationship with God is broken.*
- *This problem of unrighteousness is universal*
- *There will be a future day of judgment, where sin will be punished by death*

### ***By the way...***

It is important to make sure that the group has understood the seriousness of the problem of sin - otherwise they will not see why the gospel is such wonderful news. In traditional Chinese thinking, human nature is basically good, and becomes polluted by outside influence. Also, the Chinese word for 'sin' (罪 zui) has the connotations of 'crime', so it can be difficult to accept that humans are all 'sinners'. Explaining sin in terms of a relationship will often resonate: sin means rejecting God's loving rule, and leads to a broken relationship between God and people.

### **b) Why could the law not set us free from sin and death?**

See Romans 2:23, 3:19-20

- *No one keeps the law*
- *The law only teaches us that we are sinful; it cannot make us righteous before God; it cannot restore the broken relationship between us and God.*

### **c) How did God set us free from sin and death?**

See Romans 3:21-25

- *He sent Jesus as a 'propitiation', i.e. to die the death that our sin deserves, so that God is no longer angry with us, and our relationship with God can be restored.*
- *We are set free if we receive this by faith*

Sum this up using an illustration (see Appendix 1 for a suggestion)

### **How does this help us understand the reasons given in 8:3-4 for why we are not condemned?**

*v3: We could never have been made righteous by keeping the law. Jesus came as a perfectly righteous human and God condemned our sin by punishing Jesus for it.*

*v4: This means that God counts Jesus' perfect righteousness as belonging to us.*

### **What would we think about God if he condemned someone who has faith in Jesus?**

*He's not fair! He has already condemned our sin in Jesus; he cannot condemn it again in us.*



**Sum up the answer to the Big Question:**

*There is no condemnation for Christians because Jesus took the condemnation for our sin, and gave us his perfect righteousness. God now sees us as righteous, not sinful.*

**Firm Foundation 1:** Those in Christ *cannot* be condemned because they have been declared righteous by Christ's death.

**3. How does this passage help you when you feel condemned?**

(refer back to Starter Question b)

Meet Q, an (imaginary!) member of your small group. She has just returned home to Shanghai to work, and emails someone in your group:

*Dear X,*

*I'm back in Shanghai now and really enjoying the food! I started work a few weeks ago.*

*I've been to that chch you suggested, but to be honest it's very difficult to live as a follower back here. I keep being impatient and unkind to my parents, and sometimes I get drunk with my colleagues at work. I had a real sense of peace at chch in the UK, but I don't feel the same peace now. I worry that it's because Father's angry with me, and is punishing me in this way.*

*What should I do?*

*Love Q*

**4. How could you use this passage to encourage Q?**

**5. How will this passage help you to stand firm as a Christian in 10 years' time?**

*Nothing can change the fact that we are justified, declared righteous, accepted by God, friends with God, even though our experience and feelings towards God are bound to go up and down. We should daily thank God for the cross, so that we stay confident that we are no longer under condemnation, whatever we experience, wherever we live.*

# Romans 8:5-17

**Purpose of the Passage:** Delight that the Spirit brings a complete answer to sin

## Before the study...

1. What are the differences between life in the Spirit and life in the flesh?
2. Why do you think Paul tells us about these differences?

**1. Starter Question: When does it feel like a struggle to obey God?**

**2. Using the REPETITION TOOL, what is Paul's main topic in this passage?**

*Something to do with Spirit and flesh...*

**3. What do we learn about these two groups of people?**

(This should not take long if group members have prepared!)

Living according to the flesh:	Living according to the Spirit:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mind is set on things of the flesh (5)</li> <li>- Death (6)</li> <li>- Hostile to God (7)</li> <li>- Does not submit to God's law; <i>cannot</i> please him (7-8)</li> <li>- Is still condemned (from 1-4)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mind is set on things of the Spirit (5)</li> <li>- Life (6)</li> <li>- Peace (6)</li> <li>- Belongs to God (9)</li> <li>- Body is dead, but Spirit will give resurrection life (10-11)</li> <li>- Debtors to live by the Spirit, putting sin to death (12-13)</li> <li>- Sons of God (14)</li> <li>- Can cry to God as 'Dad' (15)</li> <li>- Can deeply know in our spirit we are God's children (16)</li> <li>- Heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ: will be glorified with him (17)</li> <li>- Suffering now, like Christ (17)</li> <li>- Is not condemned (from 1-4)</li> </ul>

#### 4. How do these two groups differ in their relationship to sin?

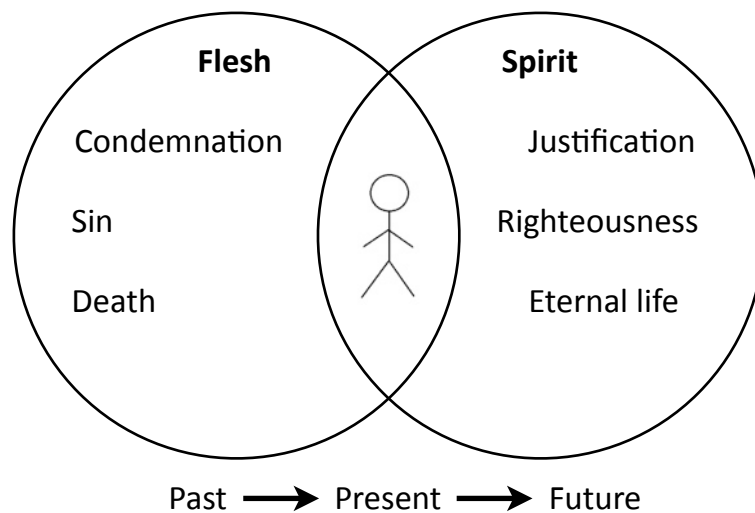
(What has already changed? What is changing?)

- *The person in the flesh is condemned for their sin and cut off from God; the person in the Spirit is justified and can call God 'Dad'.*
- *The person in the flesh cannot please God or submit to his law; the person in the Spirit can battle with sin, putting it to death (v13).*

#### 5. What is the future for each of those two groups?

*The person in the flesh will die; the person in the Spirit will have resurrection life and be glorified with Christ.*

**Sum up using the Spirit-Flesh Diagram:** (see Appendix for explanation)



An objective change has happened in the past, so future life awaits us. In the present we have the Spirit who guarantees both of these things.

#### 6. How should this passage make Christians feel? How should it help us battle sin?

- *Delight in all the benefits of being in the Spirit*
- *Confidence as we battle with sin: the fact that we can battle is a positive sign!*
- *Gives us motivation to fight sin: we have a new, better identity*

**Firm Foundation 2:** Even though Christians experience a struggle with sin, the Spirit assures us that sin has been dealt with.

### *By the way...*

In assuring us that sin has been dealt with, this passage helps us to fight sin with the right motivations. In Chinese thinking there is a strong sense of reciprocity (礼尚往来 lishang wanglai): the idea that if you do something for me, I must pay you back at some time in the future. Many people will feel that since God has given us so much in saving us, we now owe him a debt, and have to pay God back by doing good works - which easily leads to guilt, self-reliance and a sense of dreary obligation in Christian living.

Realising that the Spirit changes us and makes us able to please God reminds us that it is a wonderful thing to be able to live for God, and that we should live for him because he has transformed our identity from being a sinner to being his child. Our good works could never pay him back, as it is he who makes us able to do them in the first place!

## **7. Why should we praise God for the Holy Spirit?**

*Dear X,*

*Your email really helped me - I love those words 'no condemnation'.*

*But it's still not easy to live as our Father wants me to. My boss puts a lot of pressure on me to tell lies at work - it just seems to be what everyone does here. And it's such a struggle to be kind to my parents: I feel like I have to really fight to not shout at them. And when I'm rude to them, they attack my faith and say "If you're a follower now, why have you not become a better daughter?" It feels very depressing; my sin is still such a big problem. Please help!*

*Love Q*

## **8. How could you use this passage to encourage Q?**

## **9. In what areas might you struggle to obey God after going home?**

## **10. How does this passage help you to battle with sin, now and in the future?**

*Even though we will continue to battle with sin, we need not be disheartened: this battle is a sign that we have the Spirit in us!*

*This battle will not last forever; the Spirit guarantees eternal life in the future, when we will no longer sin.*

*We can constantly cry out to God as our Father.*

*It is so much better to live according to the Spirit than to live according to the flesh.*

# Romans 8:18-30

**Purpose of the Passage:** Christians suffer now, but wait eagerly for certain future glory

## Before the study...

1. What does this passage tell us about Christian experience in the past, present and future?
2. Why is the image of childbirth (v22) such an appropriate one to use?

## 1. Starter Question:

**8:17 mentioned 'suffering'. What sort of suffering might you face after returning home(big or small)? Why might such suffering undermine our confidence in the gospel?**

*We might think: "If God really loves me and is not angry with me, why is he making me suffer??"*

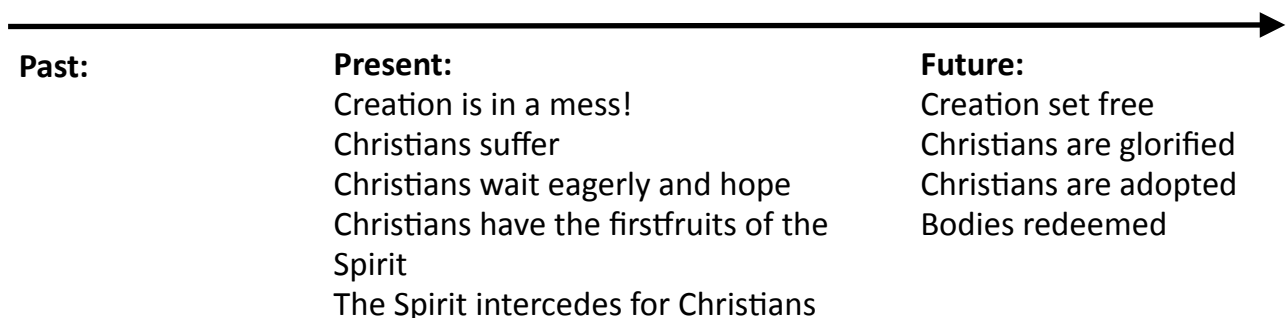
**2. (Discuss in pairs) Which of the following do you think this passage is mostly about? Why do you think that?**

- a) Suffering
- b) Glory
- c) Confidence
- d) Something else...?

**3. Complete the table:**

<b>Who is groaning?</b>	<b>Why are they groaning?</b>	<b>How should this make Christians feel?</b>
<i>Creation</i>	<i>(Why is childbirth an appropriate image, v22?) Creation has been subjected to 'corruption' and 'futility' (such as natural disasters and environmental problems). It 'waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God' - when it will be set free.</i>	<i>Our suffering is a temporary state that will be followed by a glorious future - and this pattern is echoed in the whole of creation. This should give us confidence and hope when we suffer.  It is amazing to think that the whole of creation is waiting for the glorification of the children of God (i.e. us)!</i>
<i>Us</i>	<i>We suffer now as our bodies are not yet redeemed (v23), but we wait eagerly for this to happen.</i>	<i>We should feel eager and confident as we have the 'firstfruits of the Spirit' (v23), which means that the work the Spirit has already done in us (see v1-17) guarantees his future work of bringing us to glory. v24-25: We shouldn't let the fact that our hope is unseen make us doubt, as hope is by nature something unseen.</i>
<i>The Spirit</i>	<i>He groans as he prays for us.</i>	<i>We should feel reassured: the Spirit keeps us persevering as we wait for future glory by praying for us according to God's will, even when we don't know what to pray for ourselves.</i>

**4. a) Draw a timeline of events:**



**b) So how does this make us feel about the present and the future?**

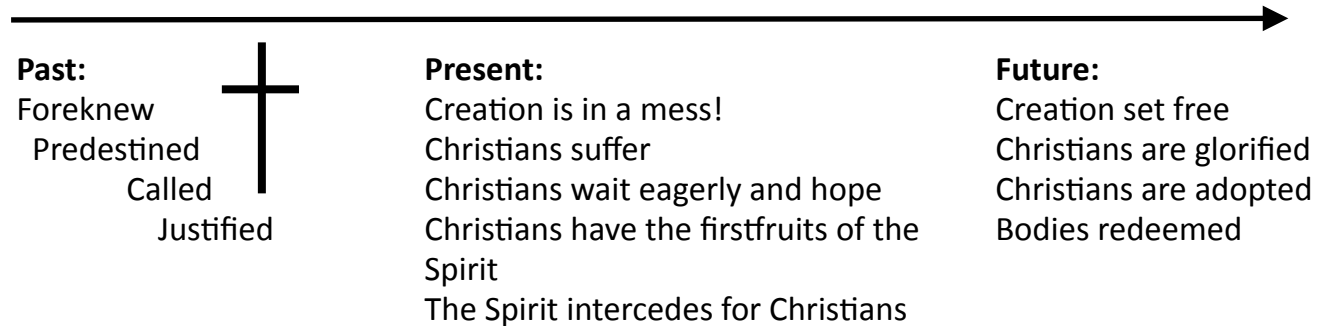
*We eagerly look forward to the future: it will be glorious!  
 We are less concerned about the present: it will be tough, but we can take comfort from knowing that the Spirit is with us. We wait confidently for the future.*

## 5. How do v28-30 give us confidence we will get to this future glory?

*God is working all things for our good (even suffering)*

*We are in an unbreakable chain of events, finishing with our glorification.*

*Add this to the timeline:*



**Firm Foundation 3:** Christians suffer now, but future glory is certain

### *By the way....*

We may or may not be going through lots of suffering at present - but tough times will come to every Christian sooner or later. The best time to get clear on the Bible's teaching about suffering is before we are actually in the midst of it, so that when the hard times come they don't take us by surprise.

People who are investigating Christianity are often attracted to it by the hope that it will make life smooth and easy, and expect that when they become Christians they will always feel happy and peaceful. The huge shock of adjusting to life in China as a Christian can lead many to question their faith, as it does not seem to have given them the easy life that they hoped for. They might come to the conclusion that Christianity 'worked' in the UK, but does not work in China.

But Romans 8 tells us to expect suffering in this life, which helps prevent us from basing our faith on our feelings, and teaches us the vital importance of life in the new creation, after we die. Such a beyond-this-world-focus runs contrary to much in traditional Chinese thinking, which places the focus on living harmoniously in this world. As Confucius said: "Until you know about life, how can you know about death?" (i.e. how we relate now is more important than what happens after we die). However, the new creation is right at the heart of the gospel, and is an essential guard against worldliness and the prosperity gospel (which teaches that Christians should experience material blessing in this life).

**6. Why do we sometimes find it hard to believe that future glory outweighs present suffering?**

*Dear X,*

*Thanks for the encouragement - it's still not easy at work, my boss still puts pressure on me to be dishonest, but I'm trying to 'live by the Sp!r!t' and do what pleases our Father. My boss doesn't understand though and makes it clear I'm letting him down; sometimes I even worry I might lose my job.*

*Also, I have some more bad news to share with you: my Dad's health has got worse and worse recently, and now he mostly stays in bed. The doctors don't know how to treat him and I'm so worried about him. You know, it just feels like life's got worse since I became a follower. Do you think I'm doing something wrong?*

*Love Q*

**7. How could you use this passage to encourage Q?**

**8. How will this passage help you face the suffering you mentioned at the start?  
How might God use this suffering for our good?**

- *Even suffering is included in v28: it is for our good, to make us more like Jesus*
- *Suffering will be outweighed by real future glory*
- *Suffering is to be expected now*
- *The Spirit is praying for us, to keep us persevering*



# Romans 8:31-39

**Purpose of the Passage:** Even in suffering, be 100% confident in God's love because of the gospel

## Before the study...

1. What sort of language does Paul use in this passage? How do you think he wants us to feel as we read it?
2. Look up Psalm 44:11-22, which Paul quotes from in v36.
  - What is the situation of the people in the Psalm?
  - So what point is Paul making by quoting the Psalm?

**1. Starter Question: How do you know that God loves you?**

**2. Using the TONE AND FEEL TOOL, how does Paul want us to feel as we read this passage?**

*Very confident in God's love: Paul heaps up rhetorical questions (v31-35) and triumphantly lists all the things that cannot separate us from God's love (v35, 38-9).*

**3. Fill in the table below:**

Paul's question	What is the answer?	How does this give us confidence that God loves us?
v31: If God is for us, who can be against us?	<i>No one significant, as with God on our side no one can harm us</i>	<i>God has chosen to act 'for us', so no one can stop him!</i>

v32: How will God not graciously give us all things?	<i>He will give us all things! Since he's given us his own Son, the most precious gift, of course he won't hold anything else back from us</i>	<i>He loves us enough to give us his Son!</i>
v33: Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?	<i>No charge against us can stand, because God has justified us (v33)</i>	<i>He sees us as righteous - he cannot justly remain angry with us</i>
v34: Who is to condemn?	<i>No one! Jesus, the only person who is righteous enough to condemn us, is instead interceding for us!</i>	<i>We cannot be condemned - Jesus himself is interceding for us</i>
v35-39: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?	<i>Nothing!</i>	<i>Even if we go through the worst trials or face the strongest enemies, nothing can call into question God's love for us</i>

4. Using the QUOTATION/ALLUSION TOOL, as suggested in the preparation questions:

a) Why does Paul quote from Psalm 44 in v36?

b) How should this passage encourage Christians who are suffering?

*Psalm 44 is a very desperate Psalm! It is written by God's people at a time when they are experiencing intense suffering, defeat and humiliation, making them fear that God has rejected them.*

*Our experience of suffering may likewise make us fear that God has rejected us - but we can be confident that this is not the case; the gospel assures us that God loves us, regardless of our experience.*

5. How does this passage help us to answer the question "How do you know that God loves you?" with greater confidence?

*Our confidence in God's love comes from the fact that we have been declared righteous because of Jesus' death (it rests on **Firm Foundation 1**, from Study 1)*

**Firm Foundation 4:** Whatever our experience, Christians can be 100% confident in God's love

Dear X,

*I can't believe this has happened. I've been prying so hard that things would get better at work, but my company has been doing badly recently, and yesterday my boss told me that I will have to leave at the end of the month. I just don't understand - without my salary, how will my parents afford the medical bills for my Dad's treatment? His health is still getting worse.*

*I tried to share my belief with my Mum but she said "You tell me that your G\*d loves you, but if that's true, why is your Dad ill, and why have you lost your job?" I didn't know how to answer her, and deep inside I'm beginning to worry that she might be right.*

Love Q

**6. How could you use this passage to encourage Q?**

**7. What things might make you doubt God's love after you return home?**

**8. How does this passage give you confidence that you will get to future glory?**

(Refer back to the timeline in Study 3)

*God has clearly demonstrated his great love for us and his unbeatable power - so of course he will complete his plan to bring us to future glory, as he has promised.*

**9. Looking back over the whole of Romans 8:**

**a) What things can you praise God for?**

**b) How will this chapter help you to stand firm as a Christian in 10 years' time?**

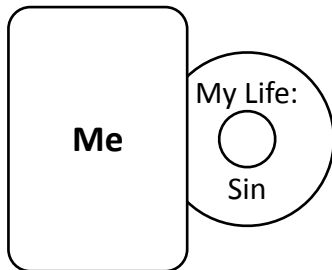
(See Study 1, Question 1)

## Appendix 1: Suggested illustration for explaining what happened at the cross, Study 1

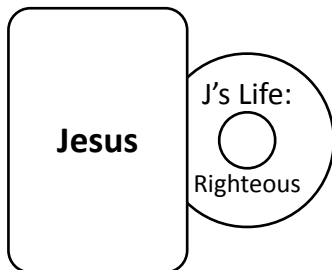
### DVD Illustration:

This visual illustration involves two DVD boxes, each containing a DVD.

The first box represents me. Imagine that someone had recorded all of my life, everything I'd ever done, said and even thought, and stored it all on this DVD.

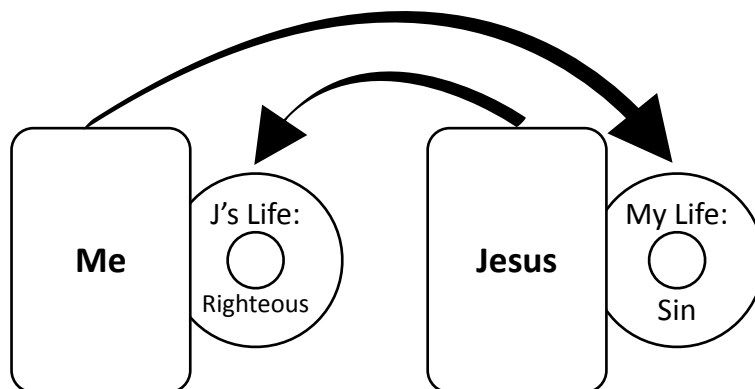


There would be some good things, some happy memories - but there would be lots and lots of shameful things. At the heart of it all would be the fact that I have rejected God and lived in his world as if I was in charge, not him: it is a DVD full of sin. God sees everything on this DVD, and one day will judge me for the life I have lived. The fair result of his judgment is death.



The second box represents Jesus, and the DVD represents the life he lived. It looks very different to the life recorded on my DVD: his is a life lived in perfect obedience and love towards God; every action, word and thought is good and perfect: he is righteous, in a right relationship with God. Unlike my life, which deserves death, Jesus' life deserves eternal life.

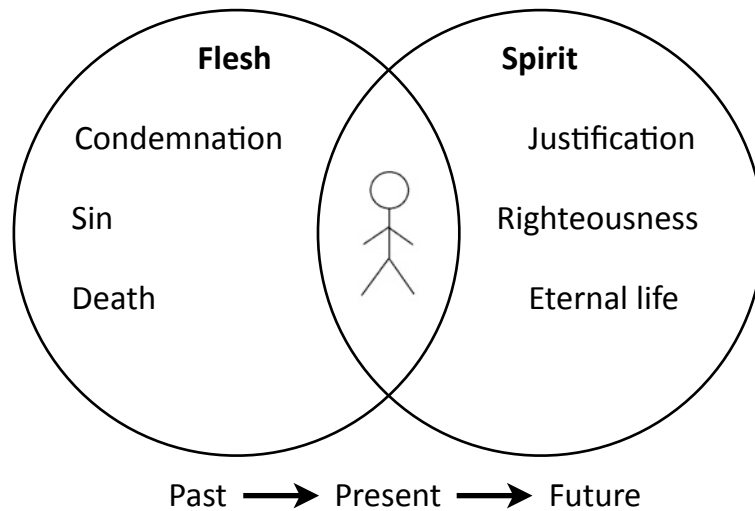
But at the cross, Jesus willingly chose to take our place. It was like the two DVDs swapped over: righteous Jesus took my sin, and with it took the punishment for my sin: death. He gave me his perfect righteousness, so that I can have the eternal life that he deserves, if I have faith in Jesus.



An advantage of this illustration is that it clearly expresses the fact that Jesus' death in our place removed our sin and its punishment once and for all. As Romans 8 says, there is 'no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus', because God has already condemned our sin in his own Son. We don't need to fear that God is still angry at our sin; to be declared righteous is to know that our sin has been completely dealt with.

## Appendix 2: Spirit-Flesh Diagram, Study 2

In Romans 5:12-21, Paul tells us that every human belongs to one of two groups: those in Adam (non-Christians) and those in Christ (Christians). In Romans 8 language, these groups correspond to life in the flesh (in Adam) and life in the Spirit (in Christ). In Romans 5-8, Paul makes clear the stark differences between these two groups of people, while also showing that Christians live in the 'overlap of the ages': i.e. our 'inner being' (Romans 7:22) - the 'real me' - is in Christ, has been justified, and is no longer under the power of sin, while our 'members' (7:23) - the 'old me' - are still in Adam, which means that we continue to sin.



Having this realistic understanding of the Christian life should give us great comfort and confidence: the fact that we continue to struggle with sin does not mean we are not 'proper Christians'. In fact, it means the opposite: this struggle is a sign we have the Spirit, who gives us the desire to fight sin. We can also take comfort from the fact that the struggle is only temporary: Romans 8:11 promises that after we die our 'body', which is still in Adam now, will be raised and join our 'inner being' in Christ. On that future day we will no longer sin - what a wonderful hope!

The 'Spirit-Flesh Diagram' helps to illustrate this, by making it clear that a real change has happened to Christians: we have *already* been saved from condemnation, and we have *already* been given the Spirit who helps us fight sin. This same Spirit will certainly finish his work in us: he will bring an utter end to sin after we die. Every aspect of sin is defeated by the Spirit; we can praise God for the gospel which has destroyed sin so completely.