

HOW TO BE A FAILURE

Romans 8:31–39

Dr. George O. Wood

Romans 8:31–39 (NIV)

“What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 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 creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

From Romans 8:18 through this last verse, verse 39, we have been looking at the theme of glory and suffering. The key to this whole section is what Paul says in 8:17: that provided we suffer with Him, in order that we might also be glorified with Him, that there is a coming together of groaning and glory, of agony and ecstasy, of suffering and joy. He has provided in this lengthy passage, from verse 18 of Romans 8 on, keys by which we, as believers, may get a grip on suffering and how to successfully come through it.

It’s instructive for a moment to just pause and remember that when Paul writes the letter to the Romans, he is wrapping up his third missionary journey. He is writing from the city of Corinth, and from that vantage point he will leave Corinth and make his way to Jerusalem where he will undergo two years’ imprisonment. And he will have another year or half-year in transit, with a

HOW TO BE A FAILURE

Romans 8:31-39

shipwreck across the Mediterranean. He will be asked to test, in his own experience, what he is writing here—as he has never been tested before in his life. And within six years after this letter has been written, the Roman believers themselves, who receive this, are going to go through the first persecution by an official Roman agency that will be the first of many persecutions through the Church's next three centuries.

In fact, to get an idea of the way that Paul was led—really, through prophecy, I think—to give this text to the early Christians is the fact that he mentions the word “sword,” and he mentions the word “famine,” and he mentions the word “nakedness,” all of which were to be breaking on the Church within, shortly, a half a decade.

A Roman historian of the first century describes some of the early suffering of these believers in the city of Rome, where he indicates that Nero sought to blame the fire of Rome on Christians. So he says, “So to get rid of the rumor that Nero had ordered the fire. Nero set up as the culprits and punished, with the utmost refinement of cruelty, a class hated for their abominations, who are commonly called Christians. The abominations are that they didn't go along with all the other gods that the Romans went along with. Christ, from whom their name is derived, was executed by the hands of the procurator Pilate in the reign of Tiberius. Checked for a moment, this superstition broke out again, not only in Judea, the source of the evil, but even in Rome. That receptacle for everything that is sordid and degrading from every corner of the globe which their minds following. [Sounds like southern California!] Accordingly, a restless first mate of those who confessed then on their evidence, an immense multitude were convicted not so much on the charge of arson, but because of hatred of the human race. [Because they didn't go along with all the other ideas.] Besides being put to death, they were made to serve as objects of amusement. They were clad in hides of beasts and torn to death by dogs. Others were crucified. Others set on fire to serve to illuminate the night when daylight failed. Nero had thrown open his gardens for

HOW TO BE A FAILURE

Romans 8:31-39

display of the burning Christians and was putting on a show in the circus where he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer and drove about in his chariot. All this gave rise to a feeling of pity, even towards men whose guilt merited the most exemplary punishment. For it was felt that they were being destroyed not for the public good, but to gratify the cruelty of an individual.”

But his words would come as a great strength to the Christians who were shortly to pass through this experience. Christians need to get a handle on suffering. Because when you look at suffering from the Old Testament context, you will find that the suffering of the people of God was—except for Job and a few isolated instances—always related to the people’s disobedience to God. When the people were chased from their land, it was because they had failed to serve God. Now punishment and captivity was being visited upon them. It was clearly indicated that their suffering was a result of their sin. But now you have a whole new context in the New Testament area where suffering does not come because of one’s disobedience or one’s sin—although that’s always still a possibility—but persons are suffering who have been in the right and stood for the right and have stood with God.

So to give Christians a help, not only in the first century, but to give us a help right now where we’re living in the suffering that we pass through, Paul has shared these things with us. He said to us, “Remember the glory when you’re going through the groaning.” He has said to us, “The Spirit helps us in our infirmity, praying for us when we do not know how to pray.” He has said to us, thirdly, “God is working all things for the good.”

Now today he comes once more to this theme of handling suffering. He says, “We now come to the last assurance that we can use in going through a time of difficulty, and that is that nothing can separate us from the love of God. No matter how difficult the circumstance is, it cannot pry us loose from God’s grip on our lives.”

HOW TO BE A FAILURE

Romans 8:31-39

To trace this theme in verse 31–39, we can look at this text by noting two things that Paul is saying about God and two things he is saying about us.

The first thing he is saying about God is this:

I. God is for us.

By the time you come to verse 31, there should be no doubt that that's what Paul says at that point. "What then shall we say to this?" Say to what? What shall we say to the fact that God's working all things for the good? What shall we say to the fact that the Spirit helps us when we do not know how to pray as we ought? What shall we say to the fact that there is laid up for us glory, which is not to be compared with the suffering which we experience now? What shall we say to the fact that Christ died for us? At the right time, God sent His Son to die for us. Scarcely for a righteous man will one die, but for an unrighteous person God would dare to send His Son to die. So the whole of verse 3 is looking back over the eight chapters of Romans that says, "By the time you're coming to this thrilling point, what then shall we say?" There's almost nothing more left to say except this: "If God is for us, who is against us?"

"God is for us" is the message of this tremendous passage of Scripture. And the purpose of this whole great, weighty portion of God's Word is to bring us to this conclusion. A conclusion which you may have faced in your life on just an idea level, but it's not even yet percolated down into your emotions where you still feel, "God is against me." No. In Christ, God is for you. There are still things against us. There's the Law of God, which has been against us, which has brought us to our need of a Savior. There is sin, which is against us. There is Satan, who is against us. Death and hell are against us. And our existence—which spans this time and the age to come—they are our mortal enemies, who are against us. But if God is for us, who could be against us? That is somewhat like an experience I used to have when I was younger. Remember, you get out on a softball diamond or something, you have a group of kids together, and you pick out teams. I

HOW TO BE A FAILURE

Romans 8:31-39

always wanted to be one of the captains. Because if someone else was choosing the team, I was always last. And it was embarrassing, especially when you got to Little League, as a 12-year-old, which is the last year you can make Little League. I still couldn't hardly catch a fly ball. I was not too coordinated. I don't know if any of you have had this experience, of being the last one chosen. Nobody wants you because they know that standing there is George Wood, a sure out! Put him in right field because that's the place where the balls are hit least. The least damage he can do to us is in right field. So what I would want to do is get to be a captain. You'd take a bat and put your hand on it and go up the ladder, and the person who had a hand on it last that could grip it got the first choice. If there was somebody who was really a super baseball player or softball player in the group, the captain that won got to choose that strong person. And once you got that person, it was a cinch you were going to win. It's all in getting first choice.

This is the kind of way I think Romans 8 is looking at life. If we've got God on our side, what's the formidable enemies? Look who's coming up to bat. Therefore, we can say, "Who's against us?" And say it with full recognition of who the enemies are, what the dangers are. But with the tremendous quiet and strong recognition: "Greater is he that is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

II. The second thing Paul is saying about God in this tremendous passage of Scripture is that God is not going to change.

Verse 32: "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?" In other words, what Paul is saying at this instance is, "If God gave up Christ for you, do you think His attitude toward you is going to change? Is He not now going to bring you safely through every experience in your life as a believer? Is He not going to take care of you?" It's an argument of the greater to the lesser. He's done the greater. Will He not do the lesser?

HOW TO BE A FAILURE

Romans 8:31-39

This idea, God did not spare or withhold His own Son. The persons in Paul's original audience who would be hearing this epistle read came from the Jewish faith and background. They would immediately pick something up that maybe a non-Jewish person would not have caught. That is, when he came to that word "withheld" or "spare his own Son," there is a key passage in the Old Testament which immediately flags the memory. It's from Genesis 22, where Abraham is asked by God to offer his son Isaac, his only son. And Abraham acts out of obedience to God and takes his son Isaac, whom it was not God's purpose that Abraham should offer in sacrifice. But rather that it might be an example of what God was going to do in the wrenching loss of His own Son, to give Him up for us all. The word in Genesis 22:16 that is used that God says to Abraham when He spares Isaac: "You have not withheld. You have not spared your son, your only son Isaac." So that the tremendous emotional feeling we have with Abraham as he goes to offer Isaac up, and we marvel and we stand agape at the mystery of why it is and how it is. But the giving of a life was necessary to take care of our sins in Christ our Lord.

Yet now, as we look at how we are to related to God, some say to God, "I don't need the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for my sins. My case is not that serious. It's not that terminal. I think I can make it on my own ability." To say that kind of thing when God has not spared His Son is to do two things. It's to challenge the wisdom of God. It's to say to God, "You really didn't know what You were doing. There's a much easier way to go about taking care of my sin than to give up Your Son, and I think I'll try my own way and see if it works." To say that is to say something about challenging God with a lack of wisdom. It also certainly makes light of His love. It spurns the great love He's had for us. For it says in the Scriptures, "He gave up Christ for us all." That means for all of those who would come to Him, He gave Him up.

That word "to give" is used in Romans 1 in a much different context when we started out. It's a full circle. We come in Romans 8 with the understanding that all of us have failed to meet God's

HOW TO BE A FAILURE

Romans 8:31-39

standard of righteousness and all of us are under what is called the penalty of sin. All of us are going to be separated from God because of our sin. But as we come through this tremendous book, we find that God in Christ has drawn us to himself and we no longer need to be in that position.

But in Romans 1, Paul three times said the word of the human race, “God gave them up.” We noted that, months ago, when we looked at that text. God gave them up. God gave them up. God gave them up. Three times, he repeats it. Now he’s saying something else that God gave up. He gave up His Son. Because while in a sense it is true He gave us *up*, in another sense it’s completely untrue that He *gave up* on us. He gave up on us outside of Jesus Christ. He gave up on us in terms of expecting anything out of our own efforts to arrive at perfection or salvation. But He didn’t give up on us, because He gave Jesus Christ for us all.

We are taught thoroughly in the Scriptures that Jesus’ death is more than simply the decision of man. That it is, Judas delivered Him up for money. Pilate delivered Him up out of fear. The chief priest and the rulers delivered Him up out of envy. But in addition to man’s delivering Christ up to die, God also delivered Him up. And God’s motive in delivering Him up was love.

Therefore, Paul says, “Will he not also give us all things?” (Romans 8:32). God does not begin to build unless He is able to finish. He does not miscalculate His resources; we sometimes do. Nor does God cramp himself in the beginning by starting on a vast and large scale and then have to stop before the purpose for which He began is accomplished. It is the Word of the Lord to say to us, “It is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 13:32). “So if God gave his Son, will he not give you all things?”

Then we tie this back in to the matter of going through suffering. We have this in mind as we’re passing through travail. I read a book that recommended that people of considerable means, or any means at all, don’t leave their children their estate. That’s kind of a unique concept. Because

HOW TO BE A FAILURE

Romans 8:31-39

if you have a lot of means, what the child will do is simply wait until they get old enough to take it. And they won't train themselves to assume responsibilities, so they won't be proper administrators of what wealth was given them. I'm not sure it's true in every case, but it's an intriguing concept. What God has done with us is put us through an inheritance training. We are heirs to the age to come, and suffering is going to teach us obedience in all things so we won't wind up being a spoiled heir of the age to come. There's nothing worse than a kid who has privilege, but has never developed responsibility. So we're being given the chance to develop responsibility as well.

We have these things that we may say God has toward us. God is for us. God's attitude toward us is never going to change. This is so liberating for me personally. I had the roughest time in my life getting it through my emotional consciousness that God was for me, and His attitude wasn't going to change. I pictured sometimes that God was just waiting for me to do something wrong so He could take back what He did in Christ, just withdraw the contract, tear it up and say, "Sure glad I didn't have to give eternal life to him!" Not so.

If I know these things about God: God is for me, and God's love for me is not going to change—it's fixed and it's growing—then there's two things I can say about myself from this passage.

III. One thing I can say about myself is I am "elect" or I am "elected," whichever word you want to use there.

Verses 33–34: "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?"

Here, what Paul does is—as frequently through Romans—he returns us to a courtroom, to a legal situation, and we're arraigned before Christ the Judge. Because God is determined to run His universe according to principles—which are objective in nature, which are legal in their performance—so He is putting us into that scene in the age to come when we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. And he is saying at that point, "Who's going to bring any charge

HOW TO BE A FAILURE

Romans 8:31-39

against us?” Then he recognizes, of course, that it is only Christ that can bring the charge against us. Only Christ can pass down the indictment. And the thought of Christ, then, bringing the charge against us is unthinkable because of what He has done for us. So therefore, we can already begin to call ourselves God’s elect.

That may be a term that you stay away from: elect. It can be a bad term if you start tossing it around and saying, “I’m elect, and you’re not elect.” We looked at that last week. You can look at terms like “predestination” and “foreknowledge” and then begin saying, “You’re not foreknowned, and you’re not predestined,” and you begin using the terms in a way that Scripture never used the terms. The terms, instead, are meant to be an assurance and comfort to believers—and not to be used as theological battles to hit somebody over the head with. It’s a very wonderful thing to realize that you are elect, or elected.

I know what it’s like not to be elected. I went through an experience when I was in college. From the day I entered college, I was running for the student body president. It was three years away, but I had my eyes set on it. I just needed this, in my personality, to be driving for such a goal. There came the day of the election, and I lost. I’ve never been so miserable in all my life, so I know what it’s like to not get elected.

The joy of being elected, like when this church selected me as their pastor. So here is an election. When we say “God’s election,” this election only takes two votes: your vote and God’s vote. God voted for your salvation, as we looked at last week, and the devil voted for your damnation. I voted with God and got a majority.

The question is going to be, “Will God withdraw His vote so that I cease to be God’s elect?” We learn from John 5, where Jesus teaches that the Father has given all judgment to the Son. And since Christ is given by the Father the task of judgment, we have to look at this seriously and say, “Is Christ now going to change His mind toward us?” This Jesus, whom we meet in

HOW TO BE A FAILURE

Romans 8:31-39

judgment, is He going to be different than we have met on earth? Is Jesus, who died, going to bring a charge against us? Is He who died for our sins to take our sins now going to put our sins back on us? Is He who rose again from the dead, that He might destroy the works of Satan—the chief one of which is death—is He now going to lay back death upon us? Is He who ascended into heaven, and who now makes intercession for us at the Father’s right hand, is He, after all of this making intercession for us, going to withdraw that and turn against us? No. We are in Him. We are not lost on an organization chart somewhere in heaven, where there are a hundred billion names from the last twenty centuries on a single-spaced, type-written sort of a thing. Seventy feet down the list, in one of the myriad family trees, there we can find our name somewhere. And once every millenium or so, the Lord looks over the list and concentrates on our name and says, “I thought of you once every thousand years!” No. The Scripture says, “He ever liveth to make intercession for us.” So, as we are living right now, we’re to understand from the Scripture that Christ—in His knowledge and wisdom and omniscience—is great enough to have a personal cognizance of us, to be personally aware of us, and to be personally praying for us and representing us before the Father.

I thought, as I was preparing this particular part of the message, “Lord, I wonder what You’re praying for about me. It’s never quite struck me before that You might be praying for me. I know I’ve used the term that You intercede for us, but I just kind of leave it at that term. But this means that You’re saying something to the Father about me. You’re making intercession. So what are You praying for me right now?” What a tremendous revelation as I began to realize that the Lord was tremendously cognizant of my weaknesses. But He wasn’t really praying from the perspective of, “Get George Wood out of his weakness,” so much as He was remembering, in His intercession with the Father, how much He loved me and how much progress the Holy Spirit had allowed to happen in my life. And He was giving thanks and rejoicing. And then He was

HOW TO BE A FAILURE

Romans 8:31-39

interceding, from that kind of a context, for my life and remembering me. So that when I meet Him face-to-face, I'm not going to meet Him as a stranger. It will be the meeting of friends. He intercedes for us.

There's kind of a beautiful thought that, as Christ is interceding for us, He is also our righteousness. And our righteousness is in Christ. So that God does not look at us except through Jesus Christ. He sees us as being perfected in Christ.

There's a thing I stumbled across this week in "The Pilgrim's Progress" that I thought was really fascinating about this. The pilgrim says, "One day as I was passing in the field...suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul, 'Thy righteousness is in heaven,' and thought, with all that I saw with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ at God's right hand. 'There,' I say, 'is my righteousness.' So that wherever I was or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me, 'He wasn't my righteousness or lacks my righteousness.' For my righteousness was right now before God. I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse. For my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, the same yesterday, today, and forever."

He intercedes for me. And then, as I come into contact with this and the fact that He is my righteousness, then the warmth of soul comes over me to recognize I'm so loved. I'm God's elected. And it's kind of like an American presidential election, really. The election is held the first Tuesday in November, but the inauguration isn't until January 20th. If you've given your life to Christ, then that's the election. The inauguration is the age to come, when He comes and receives us to Himself. So we're right now between the election and the inauguration.

This fact that God, through Christ, is interceding for me can even spill over to my relationship with other people. I can get really angry with people and upset with the way they're behaving.

Then I recognize, "What's Christ doing towards these people? He's interceding." There's an Old

HOW TO BE A FAILURE

Romans 8:31-39

Testament text that fits in with this, too—that God is not going to allow a charge to be brought against us if we have been redeemed by Christ. Zechariah 3:1,2: “Then He showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the Lord said to Satan, ‘The Lord rebuke you, Satan.’” You’re standing before the Lord. Any accusation made against you, “The Lord rebuke you!”

So there’s this quiet confidence that comes that in an age where there’s many things failing.

There is one thing that cannot fail: God’s love for me through Christ our Lord. This is an important bridge, I think, to come across in our Christian experience. I’m no longer hoping that things are right with God—fingers crossed and hope that everything’s going to work out all right—that we can never be certain of our salvation till we’re actually standing before God.

Maybe we can get 95 percent certain, but never completely certain, that this is the verdict He’s going to render. If that’s our feeling, we can never really use with confidence the term “elect.”

God intends for us to be able to use that term with confidence in our lives, that certain, quiet knowledge that because we have met the conditions that God has set forth in Christ—confessed Him with our lips, believed in our hearts, followed Him in our life—we do have that relationship.

IV. The last thing we can say about ourselves is that we are loved.

Verses 35 through 39 explicitly comes to grips with this. In these verses, we see that God has not withdrawn His love in the midst of adversity. Paul, first of all, notes seven adversities in verse 35 that cannot separate us from the love of God.

The first is tribulation. This is the pressure of circumstances or the antagonism of persons.

“Tribulation” was later translated to the Latin word which was used to describe the iron-like instrument used in a sledge to draw across wheat. It was a blunt instrument that ground out

HOW TO BE A FAILURE

Romans 8:31-39

wheat. Tribulation is like this. It's a very hard experience, a grinding experience. This can conceivably be one of the things that can separate us. The hard knocks in life.

Could the stress? That's more inward and psychological. Stress here literally means "anguish." Or "narrowness of place" is the literal translation of it. Narrowness of place. To be in a narrow place is to be boxed in and not have a place to turn around and get out. It's to be squeezed in a narrow street. The psalmist says in Psalm 118: "Out of my distress, I called upon the LORD. The LORD answered me, and set me in a large place." A large place is where you have freedom, where you can run and jump and the like. The narrow place is where you're squeezed. Is a narrow place going to separate me from the love of Christ?

Is persecution? Or famine? Especially when we remember that the Lord takes care of the sparrows, and we recall verses that speak of having food. God takes care of His own. Then we look to the fact that there have been times when believers have suffered famine and went without clothes and were in peril. Can these things separate us from the love of Christ?

One thing is for certain. These things can, with their power, seek to dim our consciousness of the love of Christ. Can seek to make us doubt the love of Christ. Can make us feel like we are alone. While they may work against our emotions, they cannot work against the real realities of the situation, the real objective love of God which is going to continue with us, nevertheless.

Paul says, in relating to these things, and he himself has faced every one of these dimensions, Psalm 44:22 is what he quotes: "For thy sake we are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep for the slaughter." That is, there is a passing through experiences where the believer simply says, "I don't understand what's happening. Lord, it's for Your sake that we're being killed. It's for our allegiance to You. I can't understand it." But then the believer transposes from that experience to go right on and say, with Paul in verse 37, "I won't stay in

HOW TO BE A FAILURE

Romans 8:31-39

this I-don't-understand. But I'll go beyond that to make one additional statement. In all these things, we are more than conquerors through Christ who loved us.”

He says, “Therefore I am sure, I am persuaded” (verse 38). He's not sure that the circumstances are going to get any better. He's not sure that he's going to have more friends or more money in the bank and the like. But he is sure of this one thing: the love of God, which is not going to alter or vary toward him. Instead—going through famine, tribulation, distress, anxiety of any kind, even the sword and nakedness—he is going to find that God is with him. And he comes through that experience as a “more than conqueror,” and the word, literally, is “super conqueror.”

We have today super men and bionic persons, but here we have in the Scripture a super conqueror. Which is descriptive of an individual who faces the suffering time, and not just barely inches through it and gets by, but who finds—by the love of God and the power of God—the ability to super-abound, to super-conquer the circumstance. So the victory that he wins far surpasses what we might have expected.

A classic example of this in Scripture is in Acts 7, where Stephen is executed for his commitment to Jesus Christ. The first Christian martyr. How does he die? Does he die with pain on his face? Does he die wondering why God allowed this to happen to him, crying out, “God, You shouldn't have done this to me. You should have spared me. You should have changed the circumstances.” How does he die? He looks up into heaven and sees the glory of God and Jesus at the right hand of God, and he says, “Behold, I see the heavens open and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God the Father.” You talk about super-abounding! That is the way he faced that experience, and he came through it a winner, in triumph.

The love of God is unaffected by all these adversities. It's unaffected by the most extreme changes of condition—life or death. That's the polarities. You can't get any wider than that.

Death and life. One Scottish preacher says this about death. I think he's so poetic in his prose:

HOW TO BE A FAILURE

Romans 8:31-39

“God does not lose us in the dust of death. How beautifully this contrasts with the saddest aspect of the power of death in our human experience. He is death, the separator, who unclasps our hands from the closest, dearest grasp and withdraws us from all our habituates and associations and occupations and loosens every bond and hails us away to a lonely land. But there is one bond that shears cannot cut. Their edge is turned on it. But One hand holds us in a grasp which the fleshless fingers of death in vain try to loosen. The separator becomes the uniter. He rends us apart from the world that he might bring us to God.”

God is with us in the extremes—death or life. The love of God is unaffected by any order of being, whether it be angels or principalities or power—which all describe hierarchy of spiritual forces. Paul says in Colossians 2:15 that Christ has triumphed over principalities and powers on the cross, making an open display of them. He says, furthermore, in Ephesians 6 that we wrestle against these supernatural forces. And, furthermore, he says the love of God is raised above the power of time and space. He indicates that neither depth nor height can separate us from Christ’s love. Death nor height.

One might wonder if Paul was using terms used in astrological language in his day, because the term which is used for height in astrology stood for a highest point a star reaches, and death stood for the lowest point a star reaches. It’s the point out of which a star rises, the abyss. In Paul’s day, as well as in ours, there are many people who believe that the position of the stars affected a person’s destiny. Paul is really kind of putting aside astrology and saying, “Whatever the stars are supposed to do, you can be sure they can’t do this: They cannot separate you from the love of God.” It may simply be a reference to time and space. No matter if you think about the distance in time and space, none of that can separate you from God’s love. For the love of God will prevail. “Can anything,” he says, “separate us from God’s love?” Anything else in creation? No, it cannot happen.

HOW TO BE A FAILURE

Romans 8:31-39

A modern writer has said this: “God, I may fall flat on my face. I may fail until I feel old and beaten and done in. Yet Your love for me is changeless. All the music may go out of my life. My private world may shatter to dust. Even so, You will hold me in the palm of Your steady hand. No turn in the affairs of my fractured life can baffle You. Satan, with all his braggadocios, cannot distraught You. Nothing can separate me from Your measureless love. Pain can’t. Disappointment can’t. Anguish can’t. Yesterday, today, tomorrow cannot. The loss of my dearest can’t. Death can’t. Life can try. Riots, war, insanity, hunger, neurosis, disease. None of these things, nor all of them heaped together, can budge the fact that I am dearly loved. Completely forgiven and forever free through Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son.”

Closing Prayer

We give You thanks, heavenly Father, for this great assurance of Scripture given to us today that You are with us always. We can face the adversity with the calm triumph of the children of God, which recognized that You indeed are for us. You’re not going to change. We are safe in You, and we are deeply loved. You have exhibited more love toward us than any other human being. As difficult as it is for us to understand—yet we acknowledge that from the Scripture—there will even be a day when our experience will be caught up with what we already, through faith, claim. For we shall see You as You are. We thank You for the hope that is with us in every moment of life. I pray for persons that may be here today that have never entered into the joy of knowing You, never given their lives to You. That today, this moment, will be a moment of turning in their own experience. For Lord, outside of the Cross, outside of confessing You as Lord and Savior, believing You in our heart, there is no assurance possible. There is no life possible. There is no beauty. There is only loss and grief ahead. But in You, we have all the promises of God fulfilled. And we now, as Your sons and daughters, are able to participate in them. I pray, once more, for persons within our own congregation who are, at this moment in their lives, passing

HOW TO BE A FAILURE

Romans 8:31-39

through difficult moments. You have sent these words to them in these weeks to give them a great assurance in their heart that You indeed are with them and they need not fear. We give You thanks for this comfort, the comfort of the Scriptures, which builds up our hearts in You.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.