

# The God Who Will Bring Good Out of Bad

by Randy Alcorn

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*Randy Alcorn's sermon emphasizes that God works all things for good, even through suffering, as part of His divine purpose for believers.*

**Duration:** 45:55

**Scripture:** Romans 8:28-29, Romans 8:35, Romans 8:37-38

**Topics:** "God's Purposes"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of believing in the truth of the Word of God. They acknowledge that there may be doubts and challenges, but encourage listeners to submit themselves to the scripture and seek God's insight. The speaker shares two tragic stories of loss and suffering, highlighting the promise that God will sustain and comfort believers in times of great evil and suffering. They also emphasize the idea that God can use these experiences for our eternal good and His eternal glory. The sermon concludes with the reminder that we are characters in God's story of redemption, and that despite the challenges we face, the story has a fantastic beginning and a never-ending, glorious ending.

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## Transcript

We're going to look at a passage of Scripture this morning that is, in its own way, pretty controversial. I remember reading this Scripture as a brand new Christian and asking myself, how could it actually be true? Romans chapter 8, and I encourage you to turn in your Bibles to Romans 8. We'll be using the PowerPoint, but we'll skip over some verses that we don't have time to look at. It's always good to look at it, but then if you want some clarity of where we're going together, you can look up the PowerPoint.

We know that for those who love God, all things work together for good. For those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.

Well, it's a very powerful passage. It's also much maligned and disbelieved. I myself have said to people, be sure you don't, when somebody's daughter dies of leukemia, don't hit them over the head with Romans 8 and say, well, you know, like to minimize their suffering.

Well, it's okay, because see, all things work together for good. Well, it's not okay. Jesus wept over the death of Lazarus out of His concern, I think, for Mary and Martha, even though He knew He was going to

raise Lazarus.

Scripture says, mourn with those who mourn. Weep with those who weep. So this passage should never minimize suffering as if it's not real, and it certainly shouldn't make us insensitive to suffering.

But at the end of the day, having said all that, Romans 8, 28 is still true. It is the Word of God. Whether it seems true to us or not is really not the important thing, because after all, we're not all-knowing.

We're not all-powerful. We're not all-good. We are finite, fallen people.

No wonder we don't get it. No wonder we don't understand. You say, well, this is beyond me.

I mean, how could all things... I mean, don't you know about all the evil in this world? Yes, I do. But how could... I mean, the terrible things that happen to Christians. Let's even leave unbelievers out of it, because this is a promise to believers.

But horrible things. There's abuse. There's rape.

There's people that are hungry. There's neglect. There's divorce.

There's terrible things that happen, and cancers, and car accidents, and a drunk driver that kills somebody. And you can't really believe that all those things somehow work together for good to those who love God. Well, I didn't write that verse.

I'm just quoting it. God said it. If it's not true, people, let's go home.

What are we doing here? Football's on. I mean, seriously, why would we even come here if we don't believe the Word of God? It would be pointless. This passage is either true or it's not.

If it's not, forget it. The rest of it isn't true either. But if it is true, we better submit ourselves to it and ask God for insight and help us to see it.

Satan does not want us to believe this verse. God does. Let's pray together.

Father, we pray that by a work of Your Holy Spirit, You would bring us not simply to understand but to believe the truth of this passage. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

In 1994, Scott and Janet Willis and six of their eight children were in a van on a Milwaukee freeway. There was a terrible accident and the van crashed. The gas tank exploded and all six children in the van died.

They were all burned to death that day. Now, what do you say to something like that? If God is all good and God is all powerful, and how do you put something like that with Romans chapter 8 verse 28 and 29? Well, I interviewed in writing one of my books on the problem of evil and suffering, I interviewed Scott and Janet Willis 14 years after the accident. And Janet, I talked to them for two hours and I wrote down exactly what they said at certain points in the conversation.

And here's what Janet said early in the conversation. She said, today I have a far greater understanding of the goodness of God than I did before the accident. At the end of the conversation, Scott Willis said, again I wrote down his exact words, I now have a stronger view of God's sovereignty than ever before.

Really? After the deaths of six children in this terrible accident, 14 years later, the mother has a far greater understanding of the goodness of God, and the father has a stronger view of God's sovereignty than ever before. This is the grace of God at work in lives to show, to demonstrate the truths of this passage of Scripture. And folks, if they can believe it, do you think maybe you and I could believe it? The truth is this, we are characters in the greatest story ever told, and God's the author of that story.

It's the unfolding drama of redemption. The story had this fantastic beginning, it's going to have a fantastic ending that will never end, as C. S. Lewis said to Chronicles of Narnia, it's the story that goes on forever in which every chapter will be better than the one before. But there's the great beginning of the story and the great ending that never ends of the story, but guess where we live? We live in the middle of the story, and the middle of the story is the one part that is characterized by evil and suffering.

And you and I live in it, and we live in it not without purpose but with the very purpose of God. Christ could have returned thousands of years ago. Christ could have come into the world two weeks after the fall and just appeared and done an atoning work and taken care of sin and death once before, but God had a purpose.

God has a purpose in what He is accomplishing in the world today. Now to see that purpose we must walk by faith not by sight. We can't base it just on what we see, we have to base it on what God says to be true.

So looking at Romans chapter eight, look at verse sixteen, I'm going to read this and then share some Old Testament passages and then come back to it, then I think we'll be able to be in a position to understand what it's saying. It says, the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and of children then we are heirs. Heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

The word heir is used three times. It's emphasizing what an heir is. An heir is someone who inherits a position from the father, in this case it's God who is king of the universe, but He wants His sons and daughters to be kings and queens under Him, to be princes and princesses, to serve and to rule the world under Him.

And then He says provided, we're His heirs provided we suffer with Him. Well wait a minute, you mean we have to really suffer in order to be qualified to be heirs? And the answer is yes, that's what the passage is saying. And that suffering is not without purpose.

That suffering is in order that. That's a phrase of purpose. In order that we may also be glorified with Him.

So let's go back. Genesis 1, God created man in His own image and what was our job? To rule the earth to the glory of God. That job was entrusted to the first man and the first woman.

And they followed it for apparently a very brief period of time before they even had children, before children came into the world. It must have been a brief period of time because God said be fruitful and multiply and surely they were fertile, you know, having been perfect in God's creation. And so in a very short period of time they succumbed to temptation and so there was only one man and one woman, whoever fulfilled, and that was for a very short time, the command to rule the earth to the glory of God.

Now did God abandon that plan? He did not. According to Scripture, He did not. Jesus didn't come into the world to provide an alternative to that original plan, but in order that that original plan might be gloriously fulfilled for all eternity, that righteous people would rule the earth to the glory of God, made righteous by the work of Christ.

That's why we see the prophecy in Daniel 2 in the time of those earthly kings. The God of heaven will set up a kingdom, a kingdom on earth, that will never be destroyed. And it will crush all those other kingdoms and it will bring them to an end.

They are going to be destroyed. But this kingdom, the kingdom of God on earth will endure forever. But then we're told in chapter 7 verse 18, the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom.

Now who would we have expected to receive the kingdom? Christ. Well He does receive the kingdom, but He shares the power, the rule of the kingdom with us, His children. And we will possess it forever.

And in case we didn't get it, in case we didn't understand that forever was more than actually a thousand years, but it's really forever, He says, yes, forever and ever. Get it? A rule of God on the earth in which His saints will receive and govern His kingdom. Daniel 7 verse 27 says, then the sovereignty, power, and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, that is on earth, on the new earth, renewed earth, will be handed over to who? Messiah? Well yeah Messiah will rule, but the text is saying handed over to the saints.

The very people that Daniel says are being often suffering and being persecuted in this life, they will rule the earth to the glory of God, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom and all rulers will worship and obey Him. Who are these rulers? Well people like you and me who know Jesus and who have been equipped to rule and who through the sufferings of this life have been brought into conformity to the image of Christ.

God does not wait until we die to begin the process of our becoming like Christ. In this life, complete the process, yes that's later, but beginning the process here and now. Now Jesus said I confer unto you a kingdom as a father conferred on me will eat and drink with Him at His table, sit on thrones judging or ruling the twelve tribes of Israel.

With application not only to the apostles, primarily to them yes, but also to all the rest of His children who says you've been faithful a little I'll put you over much. You'll rule over five cities, you'll rule over ten cities. So now going back to Romans 8 verse 16, actually verse 17, if children then heirs, we are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

We are going to inherit the rule of a kingdom provided we suffer with Him in order that we may be glorified with Him. Well why do we have to suffer in order to rule? And I think the answer is obvious if we think about it. Take the any human prince or princess that has grown up in the palace and gets everything their way.

They're not denied anything. They're happy all the time. They never have to suffer.

Do you want them to rule? No, because they will have a spirit of entitlement. Everything must go their way. They will not have the humble servant hearted spirit of the king.

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The rule of the king is that the prince will rule. The duty of the prince is to live of his own freely. That is, his free to rule least like Christ, least fit to rule the earth to God's glory.

And we should keep that in mind as we raise our children, shouldn't we? Because sometimes we're all, we're trying to protect, and of course we should protect our children in the right ways, but we're trying to keep them from seeing how life really works from the consequences. They break a toy and oh, you know, well let's go replace that toy. And we spoil, we without meaning to turn our children into the exact kind of people we don't really want them to be.

God is wise enough not to do that with us, his children. So in verse 18, Paul says, for I consider the sufferings of this present time, there aren't even worth comparing with the glory that's to be revealed to us. And the NIV says in us, and it can be translated either way.

And I think both of them are great because there are things outside of us that will be revealed to us, a glory, a magnificence outside of us that will be shown to us in the ages to come. But there will also be a glory within us. We will be part of that glory, the testimony to the angels and to each other for all eternity that God's grace had the power to transform us.

We who lived in a world of evil and suffering, we who were unworthy to go to heaven, who deserve to go to hell, will be righteous people for all eternity to the glory of God. And people apart from evil and suffering, what would we know of the grace of God? What would we know of the kindness of God? What would we know of the patience of God? God has manifested aspects of his character that are deep and profound and beautiful that we never would have seen had we not lived in a world with evil and suffering and had we not been part of that evil and suffering. You say, well, God didn't make us evil.

No, he made us good, but he made us with the capacity to choose and he knew what choice we would make. God was not taken by surprise. There's a school of thought called open theism, Greg Boyd and John Sanders and Clark Pinnock and others, and Greg Boyd in particular, his books are very popular.

I just would encourage you either not to read those books or to read them with a biblical grounding so that you're able to discern that they're not accurate when they talk about God not knowing in advance the contingent choices that his children are going to make because if God really would have known that in advance because God is all love, he wouldn't have allowed those things even to happen in the first place. And so love is the primary attribute of God. Scripture never says that.

Love is a very important attribute of God. God is love certainly, but the angels who cry out before God, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty. There are other attributes besides God's love and God is all knowing and all powerful and he knew what he was doing and he knows what he's doing with the suffering and evil that his children experience.

Second Corinthians 4:18 says this light momentary affliction that we're experiencing now is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. So here you have this light momentary suffering that's really here compared to this heavy, see the scales go like that, this heavy weight of glory beyond all comparison. Five minutes into eternity, we'll look back and we'll say, of course it was all worth it.

Maybe five seconds, I don't know, but suppose it took five years. Suppose it took 50 years. Suppose it took 500 years.

Well, that would just be a drop in the bucket of all eternity to come. The point is it will outweigh the sufferings and the evil experience in this present life. And in case you think, well, Paul, you just don't get it because see, you don't know the suffering that I've had to experience.

Well, sometime read Second Corinthians 11 verses 23 through 29. I mean, honestly, it could cause you to laugh, not because it's funny, it isn't. But if you had that thought, well, Paul, maybe you don't really understand how bad things can be.

This is just a tiny little sampling, a few phrases I took out of that passage. Countless beatings, Paul has experienced, often near death, he says. Stoned in the first century sense of stone where they throw big rocks at you to kill you.

In prison, sleepless, cold, hungry, and that's just the beginning. You read that passage, it just blows you away. In danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger here.

This happened, that happened, and you just go, man, what a poor, pathetic life. Who could endure all that suffering? And Paul calls it these light and momentary afflictions, preparing for us an eternal weight of glory. Verse 19, for the creation awaits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly. And backing up where it says the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. Again, it's like, what are God's children gonna be shown to be like? It's like God is saying, I'm gonna say to the cats and the dogs and the horses, behold the wonders of the righteousness of your transformed masters.

You never knew what people, human beings, created in the image of God were meant to be like. You never had the benefit of having them rule you. Now you will for all eternity because people transformed into the image, the glory, the likeness of Jesus Christ, king of kings, will rule the earth.

And as the whole earth fell on mankind's coattails, the whole earth will rise on our coattails. The creation subjected because of him who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. As we will be made new, the whole creation will be made new.

The creation that now groans in its sufferings. God said to Adam, cursed is the earth because of you. And God promises one day he'll wipe away the tears from every eyes on the new earth.

No more death or mourning or crying or pain. No longer will there be any curse, Revelation 22 three promises, no more curse. Second Peter three, in keeping with his promise, we're looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

Verse 22, for we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. Good news, Paul's saying, it's not the pains of death. The pains of death have nothing to look forward to but an end.

But the pains of childbirth look forward to a beginning, to new life. That's exactly what's happening. The pains of this world, as you look around and you say, Lord, I feel like things are not what they're supposed to be.

And God says, good for you. Your feeling is exactly accurate. Things are not as they're supposed to be.

Sometimes we ask, if God was all good and God was all loving and God was sovereign, why would he have created a world like this? And the answer to that is he didn't. He created a world that was perfect and wonderful and beautiful, but he did permit the evil and the suffering in order that the world which he recreates would be a world far more glorious than Eden. Eden will pale in comparison to the new earth where we are told in Ephesians 2, 7, that in the ages to come, we will celebrate as God reveals to us the riches of his grace to us and his kindness to us in Christ Jesus, things we never would have seen without having to face the evil and suffering of this life.

So the whole creation has been groaning. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, even we who have God's spirit in us, we groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. Interestingly, earlier in Romans, he talks about the fact that we've already been adopted.

Well, how is it that we've already been adopted, but we wait eagerly for our adoption to come? Well, that's the tension we see in scripture. It's the already and not yet. We're already clothed and righteous of Christ, we're not yet fully righteous as we one day will be in Christ.

So how does this work? Well, it just works the way it does because we have been saved in the past tense, we are being saved in the present tense, we're being sanctified and we will be saved in the future tense, we will be glorified. The redemption of our bodies, God's creation will not be what he intends it to be until the resurrection. Until we have the bodies that will be like Christ's body.

And he says, touch me, handle me, I'm not a spirit. A spirit doesn't have flesh and bones as I have. Substantial, but real body, sitting and eating together at feasts.

They'll come from the east and the west. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, they'll sit down at feasts together and we will celebrate and we'll tell stories and we'll look back, I'm sure, at our lives in this world and say, look at what God did. And you know what? We'll look back at some of the things which right now we are complaining about and we will see how God used them profoundly to accomplish his purpose in our lives.

One day, in retrospect, we will look back and it will be crystal clear to us that Romans 8, 28, and 29 was true all along. May God give us the faith now to believe him. He gives us his word so that we don't have to wait until we die to know that he was at work with purpose.

Yes, in the sufferings of our lives. Don't wait until then. Believe him by faith now so that you too can say, you know, as Paul says, that all things do work together for good to those who love God.

Doesn't mean you've seen it yet, but you trust him that it is true. Jesus talked about the renewal of all things when the son of man will sit on his throne and his people will rule. And Peter said in his sermon in Acts 3, Christ must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, which in the original Greek means everything, and hence the Greek scholars translate it as everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

Read Isaiah 60, Isaiah 65, Ezekiel 47, all of these texts that talk about the glorious new world that we will live in. The redemptive work of Christ is far broader than what we sometimes see it as. We narrow the redemptive work of Christ as if it's he just snatches souls out of this world to live up as disembodied spirits for all eternity.

And we think that's what salvation is. That's what redemption is. Well, it's way, way, way bigger than that.

The earth itself, Romans 8, and the creation itself will be redeemed through the blood of Christ and the work of Christ and the plan of God that was not surrendered over to Satan. It wasn't Satan, you want a victory, righteous people will never rule the earth to my glory, even though that's what I commanded them to do. No, we will rule the earth to the glory of God for all eternity.

So verse 26, likewise the spirit helps us in our weakness for we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. Don't you love that? We're told the whole creation groans, we're told that even we as believers groan, and now we're told that the Holy Spirit groans for us as he prays for us. If you think God is off in some far corner of the universe and doesn't get it and doesn't understand suffering, come on, you know those nail prints in the hands and his feet, there is no doubt that God, the second member of the triune God, the son took upon himself far more evil and suffering than any human being in all of history, and in fact, cumulatively took upon himself the evil and suffering of all, in all eternity, as only God could do, as only God could bear.

So don't think of him as this God who, you just don't get it, God. If you understood the evil and suffering in my life, and I could just see God saying to us, if you understood what I took upon myself on the cross, you would not dare to say I do not understand your suffering. I went to hell for you so that you could go to heaven to be with me for all eternity, and then you questioned my goodness and my love.

How dare we? How dare I at the times in my life when I questioned it? By God's grace, let's believe what he says. He prays for us with groanings too deep for words in verse 28, and we know that for all those who love God, all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose. Called, purpose, deliberate, not random.

We know that as the ESV puts it, for those who love God, all things work together for good. The NIV puts it somewhat differently, same idea, but in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, and then New American Standard, God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God. All of them include all things, and what is not included in all things? Does all things mean, well, a few things? Yeah, I can see how some bad things in my life have worked together for good.

Or does it mean quite a few things? Does it mean most things? Okay, most, but obviously not all. Or does it mean, yeah, everything but, and then fill in the blank of the drunk driver who crashed into my son's car and took his life, and that evil man who abused me or rapes me, and it includes this, but it doesn't include my cancer, no way, or ALS, or whatever. Are there exceptions? Well, what do you think when all the Greek scholars who translated these three different translations and throw in all the other translations too, because they all came up with the same translation, and they sit there and they debate, and they say, well, should we translate this way or that way? No, well, there's no debate, it's all things.

It means all things. It can't mean anything but all things. And so do you believe God when he says all things? I mean, every single individual thing is included in all things.

Do we believe God, or do we not believe him? Well, I don't understand how it could possibly be all things. Your job is not to understand. God knows you don't have an infinite mind.

I don't have, I mean, I don't only have a finite mind, I have a fallen mind. As if finite wasn't enough to limit me, I then have a twisted one, so that I'm not only extremely limited in my thinking, I'm not even accurate in my thinking. And so then he says, I'm the infinite God who knows all.

As high as the heavens are above the earth, so far are my ways above your ways. My thoughts above your thoughts, he says in Isaiah 55. Our job is not to understand.

He never calls upon us to be God. He warns us not to dare to presume that we ever would be God, or to think of ourselves as God. He says, trust me when I tell you that all things will work together for those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.

People, if we believe this, our lives would change. It will change. Those of you who have come to believe it more and more as the years go on, you know.

You know how it changes your perspective. Not each thing by itself is good, but all things work together for good. Not on their own, but under God's sovereign hand.

It was like when I was a kid and my mom was making a chocolate cake and she'd lay out all those ingredients. And one time I decided to sample all the ingredients. So I tasted the baking soda and the baking powder and the vanilla extract and the raw eggs.

And then finally I come to the bittersweet chocolate. You know, I'm thinking, okay, at least it's chocolate. Even that doesn't taste good.

The sugar arguably is the only thing that even goes into it that tastes sort of good, but sugar by itself is no big thing. But somehow my mother would take those ingredients and mix them together, all together, for an incredible good. And she put it in the oven.

And have you ever noticed God puts us in the oven sometimes? And the temperature seems a bit high, but he knows just how long we're supposed to stay and at what temperature and how the ingredients are mixed together. And he's gonna produce a beautiful product. And by faith, I look at this.

After tasting those ingredients, I could say, I don't believe that this cake is gonna be any good. But based upon my trust in my mother, who knows a whole lot more than I do about how to make a cake, I trust that it's going to be good. And indeed, it is good.

And God says, could you trust me as much as you would trust your mother? Could you trust me that I will weave these things together for good? Not right now, but eventually. And it requires faith. Johnny Erickson taught us that God permits what he hates to achieve what he loves.

Nancy, I have the privilege of knowing Johnny. And we spent time with her in her home. And I'm telling you, that woman, when we're around her, it is like looking into the face of Jesus.

I cannot describe. I have met people like her, but not many, where you look at the suffering that they have endured and you see what God has done to make them the way they are. Now, by the way, suffering doesn't automatically make you Christ-like.

You need to yield yourself to it and see God's hand in it. And that's exactly what Johnny has done. But I would just take you back to when she was 17 years old and there was that terrible diving accident and she broke her neck.

How many people, and I've heard her say that she literally in the hospital, she had one wish. That wish was that she could take her own life. She determined she would take her own life if only she could, but she was totally incapacitated.

So she couldn't take her own life. And she was bitter. She wanted the privilege of taking her life, but God withheld that.

And how many people crowded around Johnny and said, Romans 8, 28, isn't it obvious how God is accomplishing his purpose? Look how he's working everything for good in this young girl's life. No, nobody was thinking that. I mean, maybe some people claimed Romans 8, 28, by faith, I hope they did.

But now in retrospect, 43 years later, you look back at her life and you say, look at the disabled people all over the world who have been touched profoundly by this life. And then six months ago, whenever it was, Johnny gets breast cancer. And you think, Lord, if it isn't enough for somebody to go through what she's been through.

And now she has breast cancer. And what's Johnny's response? Not, this is easy, this is simple. No, not at all.

But she said, God, through my disability, has given me an opportunity to speak into people's lives who are disabled. And she said, now I will be able to speak to people who have cancer. And this is Christ-likeness.

These are the people that will be honored to serve under in his kingdom. But without the suffering, that Christ-like character would not come. God permits what he hates.

Johnny says to achieve what he loves. As for you, in the case of Joseph, he says to his brothers, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good to bring about that many people should be kept alive. God's plan prevailed.

In Genesis 45, he says, don't be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, he says to his brothers, for God sent me before you to preserve life. It was not you who sent me here. You didn't have that power over my life.

It was God. Whoa, you're saying God was at work in something that was evil for someone to do? Yeah, that's what scripture is actually saying. He's not the author of evil, but he's the author of a plan that transcends evil, that is greater than sin.

Who worked the evil and suffering together for good? God did. Verse 29, for those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to become conformed to the image of his son. And how do we become conformed to the image of his son? He's saying, clearly in context, through suffering.

Romans 5 says suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character. First Peter 1 says, we rejoice because our sufferings and trials have come so that your faith may be proved genuine and may result in praise and honor and glory of Christ. Ephesians 1, 11 says, in him, in Christ, we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things, there it is again, all things according to the counsel of his will.

And maybe you're looking at it going, wait, whoa, wait a minute. That just sounds too Calvinistic to me. Well, you know, I didn't write it.

I'm just quoting it. If it's Calvinistic, it's Calvinistic. But the point is, God says it's true.

Predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things. Doesn't, it used to bother me. When I was a young Christian, it disturbed me.

I would read Romans 9 and 10 and I would say, oh, this election and predestination. It troubled me deeply. Now it deeply comforts me.

And I think as we grow more in our understanding, seeing God in his sovereignty is a greater comfort. God's love would only be warm feelings and good intentions if he were not all-knowing and all-powerful. Even the worst evil and suffering God works in.

Romans 8, 28 means the worst thing that will ever happen to you, God will use for your eternal good. Here's an illustration of that. What do we call the worst day in all of human history? Good Friday.

I'll think about that. What could be worse than the only totally innocent person, the pure son of God himself, experiencing such horrid evil at the hands of wicked men and the demons and Satan rejoicing at what was happening. And we look back on that day and we call it Good Friday.

Why? Because we have the benefit of retrospect. We look back and now we see what God was doing through the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed him, but God raised him up to accomplish an eternal purpose. And those whom he predestined, he also called, and those whom he called, he also justified.

Those whom he justified, he also glorified. Glorified, that's a future thing, but he's saying it past tense just because it's so certain, it's as if it already happened. God's deliberate, premeditated, and certain plan for his children.

If God is for us, then who can be against us? Demons and people can be against us, but they're nothing. Romans 8, 28 can only be true if God's sovereignty can't be thwarted by human or demonic choices. So Proverbs 69 says, "In his heart a man plans his course, "but the Lord determines his steps.

"There is no evil person, no demon "that has any power over you, "except that God has permitted it "and God will use it as part of his plan "to accomplish a sovereign and good purpose in your life." That is what this verse means. If Job and Joseph and Jesus and Paul could look back on their horrific sufferings and see that God used them for good, can you and I, even if we can't see it now, can we by faith trust God that one day in eternity, we will see it? Do we believe Romans 8, 28 is just as true as John 3, 16? Let me just skip forward to wind it up here. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword.

See, God doesn't promise we won't experience bad things, he promises he will use bad things for our eternal good. Know in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Verse 38, for I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, listen to this, let it grip your heart, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Do you believe that? Do you believe it? We know all things must work together for good because by his grace, nothing will separate us from the love of Christ and we know that nothing will separate us from the love of Christ because he is working all things together for good in our lives. So assignment, we encourage you to do this at home. Take a sheet of paper, fold it in half, write on the top half the worst things that have ever happened to you and write on the bottom half the best things that have ever happened to you and then ask yourself what best things would not have happened if not for the worst things that happened and I can look back at Nancy and I can look back and I can say, well, in 1985, I

became an insulin dependent diabetic and it hasn't been fun but God has used that disease in my life, if I could snap my fingers and take it away right now, I wouldn't.

If God took it away, I'd be pleased but the point is what he has done in my life and an increased sense of dependence upon him, I just can't tell you how he has used that disease in my life. In 1990, through all the arrests for peaceful nonviolent civil disobedience and the abortion clinic lawsuits, I had been for the first 13 years one of the pastors of this church and I didn't wanna do anything else. I didn't wanna no longer be a pastor but through the events that happened, God yanked me out of it.

I could no longer be a pastor of this church. It was devastating, it was extremely difficult but within probably just a few months, we could already see the hand and the purpose of God and looking back at it, it's a piece of cake, it's obvious, it's easy. Of course, I see clearly how God did.

Now, if God gives us these glimpses in our lives, if I can see that the bottom half of my list, much of it wouldn't have come about. The strength of my marriage, what happened in our family, that wouldn't have happened except for the top half of the list. If we can catch glimpses of that in this life, do you think that maybe we could trust God for all the other things that we don't yet see? How they could, the things on the top half of the list could somehow work for good? God's sovereign grace is seen to be greater and causes us to become more like Jesus when he brings good out of evil and suffering than when he brings good out of pleasure and ease.

And so, let me close with Janet Willis. Eternity is a long time, she says, she who lost those children. It will be worth it.

Our children's suffering was brief and they have the eternal joy of being with God. We and their grandparents have suffered but our suffering has been small compared to our children's joy. 14 years is a short time, we'll be with him and with them forever.

So God doesn't promise us we won't experience great evil and suffering. Rather, he promises that when we do experience it, he will be there to sustain and comfort us and that he will, according to his plan, use it for our eternal good and his eternal glory. Let's pray.

Father, we know that in heaven, all of us as your children will view our lives in retrospect and we will see clearly that Romans 8.28 was true all along, even though perhaps we doubted it. God, give us the grace. Give us an empowerment of your Holy Spirit to believe the truth of this passage here and now by faith.

Help us to trust you. And when we wonder whether what you've said is true and whether you really care and whether you really understand, remind us of the nail prints in your hands and feet. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

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