
“He Works All Things For Good”

ROMANS 8:26-28

OCTOBER 15, 2023

PASTOR BRIAN SMITH

WILDWOOD CHURCH

EAST MOLINE, ILLINOIS

AT A GLANCE

Sometimes the Lord uses our pain and suffering for someone else’s benefit. Sometimes He allows us to go through difficult times and seasons in order to help other people. It’s hard to think that my pain might be someone else’s gain, but that is the example Jesus set and he did call us to follow Him. Though it might be hard to embrace, once we do, we learn that it’s really a blessing to be used by the Lord for someone else’s good; even if it means we have to endure hardship to get there.

INTRODUCTION

This morning I hope to change forever how you think about suffering and hardship and how you respond to it! That’s a tall order. But God’s Word is powerful and I believe the Lord will work in your life this morning through it.

ROMANS 8:26-28

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. ²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. ²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

INTERCESSION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Likewise points us back to the previous mention of the activity of the Holy Spirit given to us in verses 16 and 17. The Holy Spirit works in our hearts to bear witness with our spirit that “...we are children of God...” (Romans 8:16) He reminds us who we are in Christ and **likewise the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness.**

The Spirit helps us in our weakness in many ways. We’ve already read that by Him we put to death the deeds of the body. (8:13) He sets us free from the law of sin and death. (8:2) He gives life to our mortal bodies. (8:11) Another way the Spirit helps us is intercessory prayer.

Verse 26 continues 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.

All creation is groaning together in the pains of childbirth. We also, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly. (8:22-23) The Holy **Spirit intercedes with groanings too deep for words.**

Paul uses the same language to describe the Spirit’s prayer for us as he does to describe our response in suffering. He empathizes with us. He understands how we feel. He resonates with our hardship, suffering, & agony. His intercessory is so intense that Paul describes it as **groanings too deep for words.**

We have a very present helper and counselor in the Holy Spirit. This is contrary to the notion that God is dispassionate, disconnected, & distant, He is empathetic, available, & close. But He is more

than just an empathetic ear. The Holy Spirit is Himself praying for us! He is interceding on our behalf. He is taking our needs directly to the throne of God.

WHEN WE DON'T HAVE THE WORDS

Paul says we **do not know what to pray for as we ought**. We find ourselves unable to pray **as we ought**. In another letter Paul wrote, *“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.” 1 Thessalonians 5:18* We know we ought to do this. Prayer should be a constant and continual state of mind for us and we ought to pray the will of God. But there are times when we just don't know what to pray.

There are times when we are in such despair, such agony, such frustration, or anger, or confusion, or helplessness that **we do not know what to pray for**. There are times when we are so perplexed that we can say nothing more than, “Lord help.” It is in those moments we can be assured the Holy Spirit is pleased to intercede for us.

Verse 27 And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

He who searches hearts is God the Father. He **knows what is the mind of the Spirit**, what the Spirit is thinking, and not only **knows** but accepts the intercession of the Holy Spirit **because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God**.

It would be impossible for the Spirit to pray against the will of God because there is perfect unity in the Trinity. The Spirit can in no way contradict the Father or He would contradict Himself. Our Father and the Spirit are in total agreement.

What is incredible, though it's not mentioned here, is that Jesus, intercedes for us as well.

“Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.” Hebrews 7:25 We have the Holy Spirit interceding for us here on earth and Jesus interceding for us in Heaven. And they pray to the Father who knows and accepts their prayers!

If you had any idea the prayers uttered on your behalf in the heavenly realm! Even when no one that you know of is praying for you, the Trinity is interceding for you.

FOR WHOM DOES THE SPIRIT INTERCEDE?

He **intercedes for the saints**. Biblically, **saints** are ordinary people who have been born again by the Spirit of God, who trust in Jesus for salvation, and as a result have the Spirit dwelling in them. (8:9) This glorious promise of the Spirit's intercession is to the faithful.

Verse 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Notice the connection between verse 27 and 28. The Spirit intercedes for the saints and God works all things together for the good of **those who love God**. Biblically, a saint isn't a special class of Christian but neither is a saint a person who had a one-time experience at some point in their life. A saint is someone who loves God.

LOVE FOR GOD IS A RESPONSE TO HIS LOVE FOR YOU

When you trust in Christ, you recognize His sacrifice is the epitome of God's love. *“God demonstrated His love for us in this that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8* You also receive the Holy Spirit as a seal, or as firstfruits. (8:23) He dwells within every born-again believer and He fills us with God's love. *“...God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” Romans 5:5*

You feel God's love for you because you're filled with it. Then something happens in response to God's love toward you. *"We love because He first loved us."* 1 John 4:19 You respond with love for Him and others.

All who believe the Gospel, who trust in Christ and His atoning work on the cross, know the love of God. And because He loved us and put His Spirit in us, the result is that we in turn love God. Biblically, that's what happens at conversion. It's not something we make ourselves do. Loving God is not a task we fulfill. It's an urging prompted by the Holy Spirit within us. It's a response to His love for us.

It's like driving to a mountain. The moment you see the peak as you wind your way through the foothills, you crane your neck soaking it all in. And then you arrive at the base of the mountain and look up and grasp the enormity of it, you respond with awe and wonder. You're drawn up into the majesty of it. And the higher you ascend the more you're enthralled you become.

Something similar happens when you behold the God who created the mountains. You come into relationship with Him and He changes your affections, He pours His love into you through the Holy Spirit. For the first time ever, you know you are truly & unconditionally loved.

You feel the love of God in your heart and it draws you closer to Him. You desire to commune with Him and grow closer to Him through His Word and through His Spirit. You are mesmerized by His grandeur and majesty; how could it be that such a God has **called you according to His purposes?**

This is too lofty a thought, too high an aspiration, and yet you are convinced it is true because the Spirit "bears witness with our spirit that we are in fact children of God." (8:16) And you love Him as His child.

WE KNOW, BUT DO WE REALLY GET IT?

Paul began this verse with **And we know**. This is arguably one of the most often quoted, and misquoted verses of the entire Bible. We know, but do we really get? What does Paul mean when he says **all things work together for good?**

All things means everything, good and bad. Thus, there is nothing that evades God's purposes. Nothing slips by, catching Him unaware. There is nothing that God does not use to achieve His purposes in the world and in your life.

Right off the bat, we can acknowledge this verse does not say that everything is going to feel good in the moment. Nor does it even say it's all going to work out in the end. It doesn't say that if you just wait long enough, it's all going to come together. Paul isn't telling us that with enough faith, we can have God turn everything around for us just the way we want Him to.

This verse is deeply personal; it's personal for me and I'm sure it's personal for you. But we are missing something when we read Romans 8:28 only through a personal lens.

A HISTORICAL EXAMPLE

Let me give you a historical example. On October 6, 1536 a man named William Tyndale was strangled to death at the stake and then his body was burned. His crime? Believing that the Bible alone should guide and instruct Christian living and that every Christian should be able to read the Bible in a language they understand.

Tyndale translated the scriptures of the New Testament and then Old, into English. Charged with heresy, Tyndale was brutally martyred and his body desecrated. Let's be honest, the way most people approach Romans 8:28, the Lord did not work that out for Tyndale's good.

I cannot imagine Tyndale thought it was good that he was stripped in public, tied to a stake, & strangled to death, knowing his body would be burned for all to see. No doubt he was a man of conviction. No doubt he was honored to suffer for Christ. But let's be honest, that was not what any one of us would call **good**.

Yet, God's Word does not lie. So, it was good, or at least it was worked **together for good for those who are called according to His purposes**. Though it was not a good thing for Tyndale to die at the stake, his willingness to endure suffering was worked together for good. Right now William Tyndale is reclining in paradise with Jesus while most, if not all, of those who burned his body are feeling the flames of hell.

Less than 500 years ago a man was strangled to death so you could have a Bible written in your own language. Do you read it? Do you thank the Lord for it? You bet I do! What I thank the Lord for cost a man his life.

YOUR PAIN, THEIR GAIN

Here's my point, when we consider our lives and especially when we consider how Romans 8:28 applies to our lives, we must rise above egocentrism. Egocentrism acts as if God's highest and best purpose is that you get what you think is good.

What if, in God's sovereign plan, your loss or your pain & suffering is meant to bless a brother or sister in Christ? You've heard it said, "No pain, no gain." But what if your pain is another person's providential gain? Are you ok with that? Are you ok if the Lord works in your suffering so that the primary benefactor is someone else? If His purpose for your pain is to bless others?

Let me give you a personal example. You've really gone out of your way this month to show your appreciation to me and our other pastors and elders. I know that many of you thank the Lord for bringing me here. I am grateful for that. I am blessed to be your pastor.

But I am who I am, and where I am, because of suffering. The last four years have been some of the hardest of my life, but they've made me a much more sensitive pastor and husband and father. These hardships have humbled me. They've made me more empathetic. You thank the Lord for me, but it was suffering that made me.

I'm a Texan, and I am living in the Midwest. His working things for the good meant my wife and kids had to say goodbye to our family and friends in Texas and move across the country. Don't get me wrong, I see it as good now. But, in the years leading up to the decision to leave my home, it was not good, nor did it feel good when we loaded our vehicles and drove away.

Even before that, Kellye and I endured every parent's nightmare, the death of a child. It was out of that intense suffering that I was saved and called into ministry. You thank the Lord for me, but it is only because the Lord did not work all things together for my good according to how I defined good at that time, that I can even stand here before you as a saved man, let alone as your pastor.

I can genuinely say I am grateful for what God has done through all of this hardship. I see in part how He has worked all things together for good through these hardships for me and for you. I would not go back and change it if I could. The Lord saved me and He made me your pastor and all the pain we've endured to get to this moment is ok with me because it is good, not only for me but for you.

I use my own story to show that sometimes the Lord allows us to suffer for someone else's good. Recall from Romans 8:22 that the illustration Paul used to describe our suffering is birth pains. A woman groans in pain for hours and hours in order to give life to another human being. Conceptually, we understand suffering primarily for another's good. But practically, we wish it weren't so.

Childbirth is one thing. But enduring hardship so that God can use me in someone else's life? That's more difficult to accept. Sometimes the Lord will work everything together for good in ways that you never know are good, that never feel good, & that you never fully understand.

GOD WORKS IN YOUR SUFFERING TO CHANGE OTHER PEOPLE'S LIVES

He is working in your life through the suffering of other people. People who were martyred five centuries ago, people who endured the crucible of pain the last four years, & people presently enduring it.

And He is using your suffering for the good of others today. He's using your suffering to purify your faith and bolster your testimony so that someone else may benefit from it. He is allowing hardship to refine and purify your faith so that someone else, who you might never met this side of Heaven is impacted. Can you be ok with that?

RECIPIENTS OF UNDESERVED GRACE

Are we not all the benefactor of one man's pain & sacrifice? Are we not all walking in the shadow of the Son of God who called us to take up our cross and follow Him as He took up His cross in obedience even unto death? Are we not all recipients of undeserved grace that cost Jesus everything?

This takes us back to where we began in **verse 26 The Spirit helps us in our weaknesses for we do not know what to pray for as we ought.** In our suffering, we tend to get egocentric, and our prayers tend to revolve around us. We tend to tell the Lord what we think He ought to do for us. We tend to come to Him informing Him what we'd like to happen rather than asking for help to submit to what He wills.

It's in these times that we're to invite the Spirit to intercede on our behalf and trust Him to pray for us according to the will of God. We need to remind ourselves of God's loves for us demonstrated by the cross of Christ and that we love Him as His children.

In our submission to God's will, we are most emulating our Savior, the Son of God. For it was He who prayed, "Father, not my will, but yours be done."

As we turn now to a time of reflection prior to communion, would you ask the Lord to help you submit to His perfect will like Jesus? Would you seek His strength to be ok when your pain is worked together primarily for the for the good of someone else? One thing is certain, one day you will agree, everything that has happened to you and how the Lord used it is, in fact, good.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bruce, F. F. (2008). *Romans: An introduction and commentary*. Inter-Varsity Press.
- Doriani, D. M. (2021). *Romans*. P&R Publishing.
- Hughes, Kent R. (1991). *Romans – Righteousness from Heaven*. Crossway.
- Kruse, Colin G. (2012). *Paul's Letter to the Romans*. W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Longenecker, Richard N. (2016). *The Epistle to the Romans*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- MacArthur, John. (1991). *Romans 1-8*. Moody Publishers.
- MacArthur, John. (1991). *Romans 9-16*. Moody Publishers.
- Moo, Douglas J. (2018). *The Letter to the Romans, Second Edition*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Mounce, Robert. (1995). *Romans*. B&H Publishing.
- Schreiner, Thomas R. (2018). *Romans, Second Edition*. Baker Publishing Group.
- Sproul, R. C. (2019). *The Righteous Shall Live By Faith – Romans*. Ligonier Ministries