

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (Romans 8:28-30 NIV2011)

It's for Your Good

I remember sitting at the table. No matter how much I stared, how much I wished that pile of potato salad wasn't going to disappear. Mom and dad insist, "It's for your good." But it didn't make that potato salad any more appealing or taste any better.

You try and assure your children, "It's for your good," as you go to the doctor's office. But it doesn't make the shot any less frightening or any more enjoyable.

"It's for your good," we try and tell ourselves when facing a less-than-ideal situation. "It's for your good," you encourage yourself to keep pushing and to persevere.

But would you have said that to the man who finds out that his children were killed in a horrible accident? Would you say that to the man after he loses his entire livelihood? Would you say that to a man who says, "My eyes will never see happiness again?" That's Job. But it's not just him. Sadly many others have lost their jobs, their livelihoods, have buried their children, have said goodbye to their loved one and friend.

What do you say to the man taking care of his bed-ridden mother-in-law? That's Peter. What about all those who crowd at the house with their sick, diseased, and demon-possessed? But it's not just them. So many others are taking care of and watching over sick parents and people they care about. Many are bed-ridden with their own sickness of the body, mind, depression and anxiety. What do you say to them?

Here's what Paul says: "We know God works with all things for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (v.28).

This isn't a guess or strong wish that Paul has for himself. **We know** this is what God does: God works with all things for the good of those he loved first. The blessings along with the struggles, God uses. The mediocre, regular annoyances of life to when the bottom of life falls out, God see an opportunity. There is nothing that God looks at it and says, "Yeah, you surprised me with that one. Really don't have a good handle on the situation. Don't know what to do with that." He's always in control working with all things for good.

We know this, but those bills aren't going to pay themselves. But, you look at the numbers and you don't know how this is will work. But, you are a realist. We know this, but you still have that pain that makes sitting and standing miserable. But it hurts

you to see how they are suffering. But you just don't want to deal with life and people right now. We know God does this, but you still miss your loved one and it hurts to think about them. But you still aren't getting along with your family very well. You still feel like you are on the outside and don't really belong. You still feel lost.

We know God works all things for good, so why am I still suffering? Why doesn't he just stop it? Haven't I struggled enough? Am I paying for something I did in the past? It's not that you want much, you just wish it was a little better. You wouldn't mind seeing that supposed good more clearly because you are really struggling right now.

If God works all things for good, why doesn't he just stop it before it starts? Why does it seem like the "bad guys" are winning? Why doesn't he just put a stop to the violence, the murder of babies, the abuse of his gift of marriage, the taking advantage of the weak and those who can't defend themselves? We know God makes this promise. We also know that when you look at life it looks a lot like a puzzle that's a disjointed, jumbled up mess. You know a few pieces go together, but you can't see the big picture of how it all connects. So, Lord, you claim to be in control. You claim to work for good. So why don't you show it a little bit more?

That's it, isn't it? It's not enough to know the promise; we also want to know the proof of how he will accomplish it. And until then, we feel like we have some right to doubt his goodwill and question his control. We feel like his love is lacking or shorting us in some way. Until he does show the proof, we feel we have the right to continue to set down ultimatums and to question who He is.

To which God says, "**My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways**" (Isaiah 55:8) and also, "**Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor**" (Romans 11:34). It sounds harsh, but we don't need to know. God didn't need your opinion when he forms the earth. He wasn't looking for your input when he creates you in your mother's womb. So often we find ourselves asking that question, "Why God?" and expect an answer. We feel that we deserve to know! And sometimes we speculate and go down a line of maybe's. Other times God graces us with some clarity so we can see how the dots connect and, in a way, know how he worked for the good. Others times, the best and only answer is, "I don't know." Instead of speculating, focusing on what we don't know and making demands from God that we have no business asking, focus on what we do know. We may not be able to see how the great puzzle of life all fits together. But the creator of that puzzle knows the whole picture and he works for good. That good isn't necessarily riches, fortune, or a comfortable life. Those things along with this world and everything in it is passing away. God wants to give you something better and lasting. For good is God's plan for you to be with him forever.

Paul says that God “foreknew you” (v.29). So before he sets the world’s foundation and puts time into motion, God knew you. He knew this is where you would be at today. He knew what you would look like and the type of person you would be. He knew you more intimately and clearly than you could know yourself. And those God foreknew, he also predestined. This isn’t that God predetermines your actions so you are like a puppet on a string. He did not preprogram you like a robot to do certain things. He predestined you in that he thought about you beforehand, chose you, and marked you off: “To be conformed to the image of His Son” (v. 29). When he looks at you, he wants to see the image of His Son Jesus.

The problem is we aren’t. And, by nature, you are his enemy. You are not like him. You are hostile towards God. Those of flesh and blood, you, cannot please God. Knowing full well what you would do and what you are like, God should have said, “Yeah, I can’t work with that. I’m not going to touch that.” Instead, God puts himself within time and space, takes on your flesh and blood, to care for people. He doesn’t pull away from the sick or is afraid to be near the diseased. No, he’s a flesh-and-blood Savior who lovingly touches those he came to help, to serve, and to save. He’s there in the flesh-and-blood suffering along with you. He endures the struggles just like you do. He feels the temptation to doubt and question just like we have. And it’s your brother Jesus who goes to the cross because this is the way to save. When he hangs there beaten and bloodied and dying, one might wonder how God could ever work this out for good. It looks like Jesus has lost and God’s enemies have won! When the Father turns his back on his Son and God forsakes Jesus for the sin he had become, what good could ever come of this? Then Jesus bows his head and it seems like all hope fades with Jesus’ last breath. For those who loved Him, while they bury him in that tomb, they may have wondered what’s going to be the next piece to the puzzle. They didn’t know. But God knows. And He raises Jesus so that he might be the firstborn from the dead. Now that Jesus lives we have proof that we need. His perfect life was enough. We have the proof we need to know that sin’s debt is paid in full. We have proof that with his death he has destroyed the one who held power of death—that is the devil. Even death itself has been swallowed up in victory for those God loves. And because he loves you, he is making you to be in the image of his one and only Son Jesus. So as Jesus suffers on this earth, so we too expect the same. At times we may honestly feel like Job that our days swiftly pass away and come to an end without hope. Sometimes life feels like a breath and we wonder if we will see happiness again. As Jesus struggles against temptation, so we too are not spared from this difficulty. As Jesus dies, unless he returns first, we will the same.

At the same time, we know that God works with all things for the good those who love him, those he predestined to be his own. For those he predestined, he also called. As he

put himself into time and space to live and die for you, so he speaks in time and space to call you through the gospel that you might share in Jesus' glory (2 Thessalonians 2:14). You who he called, he also justified. Already at the cross Jesus declares you to be, "Not guilty," of sin. That's what he promises as he wraps you in Jesus' perfection and holiness in the waters of baptism. He counts you amongst his children, one of Jesus' many brothers and sisters. That's what he assures you when you receive Jesus' body and blood in the Lord's Supper. You—the one taking, eating, and drinking—your sins are forgiven. You are justified before God. And, as far as God is concerned, you who are called are also glorified. Just as Jesus was raised from the dead with a glorified flesh and blood body, so we too will one day be raised in His image with glorified flesh and blood.

Right now we see through a mirror darkly and we can't tell how the pieces are all going together. But God does and one day we too will see clearly. Until then, even our suffering is already taken care of and in God's hands. It's going to be okay. While we wait, share the Good News. Encourage each other as we shoulder each other's burdens giving real comfort with the gospel. As we deal with living in this messy world, actually listen. Don't just try and fix. Listen and share the real hope that we have. It's not coming from the legislative offices, proposed stimulus plans, vaccine receiving, mask-wearing, or our personal freedoms. Our confidence is in what God reveals to us: he works with all things for your good. Amen.