

# **Glorifying God**

## **Glorifying God by Discipleship**

*Romans 8:28*

**Rev. Freddy Fritz**

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# Glorifying God by Discipleship

## Scripture

Today is the third Sunday in our series on “Glorifying God.” Our ultimate goal in life is to glorify God. We glorify God in a number of different ways.

One way in which we glorify God is by becoming like Christ. The Bible says in Romans 8:29: “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.” God’s plan has always been to make you like his Son, Jesus Christ. God wants all of his children to bear the family resemblance, which is most clearly seen in his Son.

Today’s text is Romans 8:28. I want to use this text to show you how God makes us like his Son. Let’s read Romans 8:28:

**<sup>28</sup> 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. (Romans 8:28)**

## Review

Our ultimate goal in life is to glorify God.

The first question in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* asks, “What is the chief end [or goal] of man?” The answer given is, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”

The reason we exist is to bring glory to God. God created us and all things for his own glory.

The mission of our church is “to bring people to Jesus Christ and *membership* in his church family, develop them to Christ-like *maturity*, equip them for their *ministry* in the church and life *mission* in the world, in order to *magnify* God.”

Our mission as a church is to glorify God in each of five key areas: *membership*, *maturity*, *ministry*, *mission*, and *magnification*.

Interestingly, each of these five key areas corresponds to how we glorify God in our personal lives too.

*First, we bring glory to God by worshiping him.* We studied this key area two weeks ago. This key area corresponds to *magnification*.

*Second, we bring glory to God by loving other believers.* This is what we looked at last week. This key area corresponds to *membership*, which brings us into fellowship with one another.

*Third, we bring glory to God by becoming like Christ.* This key area corresponds to *maturity*. We will look at this today.

*Fourth, we bring glory to God by serving others with our gifts.* This key area corresponds to *ministry*.

*And fifth, we bring glory to God by telling others about him.* This key area corresponds to *mission*.

## **Introduction**

Today, we want to examine how we bring glory to God by becoming more like Christ, which is glorifying God by discipleship.

How do we become more like Christ? God uses a process to make us more like his Son. It doesn't just happen overnight. It is not that we become a Christian one day and then we are like Christ the next day. No. It takes a lifetime of steady, determined, disciplined growth to become like Jesus.

The process that God uses to make us more like Christ is called discipleship. God uses lots of things in this process. He uses his Word. He uses prayer. He uses people. He uses trials. He uses tragedies. And so on.

## **Lesson**

Today, I simply want to give you the foundation that God uses to make us more like Christ.

In Romans 8:28 Paul lists five truths about the process that God uses to make us more like Christ that **we know**. So, let us observe five unshakeable convictions that **we know** concerning the process that God uses to make us more like Christ.

## I. **God Works (8:28c)**

The first unshakeable conviction we know concerning the process that God uses to make us more like Christ is that **God works** (8:28c). That is, God is at work in our lives.

If you have a *King James Bible* or a *New King James Bible*, you may have noticed that Romans 8:28 reads something like this, “And we know that *all things* work together for good.” This translation should be rejected, since all things do *not* automatically work themselves for our good. The reason we reject this translation is because in the Greek **God** is the subject of the sentence. So, it is not *all things* that are at work; rather, it is **God** who is at work.

However, we could accept the *King James Version* translation if, as Dr. Doug Moo says, “it is the sovereign guidance of God that is presumed as the undergirding and directing force behind all the events of life.”

William Carey, often called the Father of Modern Missions, faced a ministry disappointment of overwhelming proportions. Carey began his missionary career to India in 1793. He labored in that country for 40 continuous years, never once returning to his native England. Carey was a prodigious translator, translating portions of Scripture into over a dozen Indian languages.

One afternoon, after 20 years of plodding labor in that country, a fire raged through his printing plant and warehouse. All of his printing equipment was destroyed, but most tragically, many of his precious manuscripts were completely consumed by the fire. Of course, Carey had no computer back-up files or Xerox masters. Twenty years of nonstop labor were gone within a few hours.

How would he respond to this crushing devastation? William Carey wrote to his friend, Andrew Murray, in England:

The ground must be labored over again, but we are not discouraged. . . . We have all been supported under the affliction, and preserved from discouragement. To me the consideration of the divine sovereignty and wisdom has been very supporting. . . . I endeavored to improve this our affliction last Lord's day, from Psalm 46:10, "Be still and know that I am God." I principally dwelt upon two ideas: God has a sovereign right to dispose of us as he pleases. We ought to acquiesce in all that God does with us and to us.

Carey understood that it is not *all things* but rather **God** who is at work in our lives. God is, as John Stott observes, "ceaselessly, energetically and purposefully active on our behalf."

The first unshakeable truth that we should know is that God is at work in this world. It is his world. He is the Creator. He is the Sustainer. He is in providential control of all things.

If you are a Christian, you must not have a fatalistic view of the world. You must know that God is at work in this world—even when it doesn't seem as if he is.

## **II. God Works for the Good of His People (8:28d)**

The second unshakeable conviction we know concerning the process that God uses to make us more like Christ is that God works **for the good** of his people (8:28d).

The Bible teaches us that God is good, and that all his works are expressions of his goodness that are intended to promote his people's good (2 Chronicles 7:3; Psalm 25:8).

The famous blind songwriter Fanny Crosby wrote more than 8,000 hymns. Warren Wiersbe revealed this and other interesting facts of the life of Fanny Crosby in one of his books.

Wiersbe wrote that when Fanny Crosby was only 6 weeks old a minor eye inflammation developed. The doctor who treated her was careless though, and she became totally and permanently blind. Fanny Crosby harbored no bitterness against the physician,

however. In fact, she once said of him, “If I could meet him now, I would say thank you, over and over again for making me blind.”

She felt that her blindness was a good gift from God to help her write the hymns that flowed from her pen. According to those who knew her, Fanny Crosby probably would have refused treatment even if it could have assured the restoration of her sight.

Fanny Crosby understood that God works for the good of his people. She understood that he allowed her to go blind for her good, to make her *better* instead of *bitter*.

This does not mean that his good is what we think is our good. We may think that it would be good, for example, if we had certain material things, and they may perhaps be good in and of themselves. But God’s good ultimately is to make us more and more like Christ.

We must believe that God is at work for our good. We may not understand how things will work for our good, but we must believe that God is, according to this text, at work for our good, which is to make us more and more like Christ.

### **III. God Works for the Good of His People in All Things (8:28b)**

The third unshakeable conviction we know concerning the process that God uses to make us more like Christ is that God works for the good of his people **in all things** (8:28b).

God works for the good of his people not merely in the good things or the indifferent things but **in all things**. That includes the *sufferings* of verse 17 as well as the *groanings* of verse 23.

God uses all kinds of things in our lives. He uses trials and tragedies. He uses difficulties and hardships. He uses sorrows and griefs. And so, as commentator Anders Nygren says, “Thus all that is negative in this life is seen to have a positive purpose in the execution of God’s eternal plan.” There is *nothing* that is beyond the scope of his sovereign decrees.

Many years ago a group of men were carrying on a conversation. One of them remarked that he had learned to recognize that God works for the good of his people **in all things**.

“Would you believe,” he said, “that a little thing like a pair of socks changed the entire course of my life?”

“I can hardly believe that,” replied another man.

“Well, it’s true! Once I planned to take a trip with some of my friends on a canal boat, but two days before we intended to leave, I injured my foot while chopping wood. It was only a small cut, but the blue dye in the homemade socks I wore poisoned the wound, and I was compelled to stay at home. While my friends were on their journey, a powerful preacher came to our town to hold evangelistic meetings. Since I didn’t have anything else to do, I decided to attend. The message touched me deeply, and as a result, I was converted to Christ. Afterward I saw that I needed to change my life in many ways. New desires and purposes took hold of me. I determined also to seek an education, for I trusted that this would enable me to live more usefully for my Lord.”

The man who made these comments was none other than the former President of the United States—James A. Garfield!

We often do not *understand* what God is doing **in all the things** that happen to us. A spouse dies. A loved one is diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease. A child is discovered using drugs. A friend turns against us. A car breaks down.

While we often do not *understand* how God is working for our good **in all things**, we must *believe* that God *is* working for our good **in all things**. That is what it means to trust God.

We must believe that God uses all these things in our lives to make us more and more like Christ.

#### **IV. God Works for the Good of Those Who Love Him (8:28e)**

The fourth unshakeable conviction we know concerning the process that God uses to make us more like Christ is that God works for the good of **those who love him** (8:28e).

This is a necessary limitation. Paul is not expressing a general, superficial optimism that everything tends to everybody's good in the end. No, if the good, which is God's purpose to make us more like Christ, then its beneficiaries are his people who are described as **those who love him**. In other words, Paul is limiting the truth of this verse to Christians *only*.

We are reminded here of something that is emphasized everywhere in the Bible. There is only one real division of the human race ultimately. We are on one side or the other of this dividing line, and all other divisions and distinctions are finally irrelevant. This statement is true only of **those who love** God, that is, of Christians.

As for those who are not Christians the Bible tells us plainly that all things do not work for the good of them. They, the Bible tells us, are under "the wrath of God" (1:18) because of their sin. Paul has already warned us in Romans 1:18 that "the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness." That is the present position of non-Christians before God. Whatever else may be true of those who do not love God, however happy and prosperous they may be, however much the sun may seem to be shining on their heads, the terrible fact remains that they are all presently under the wrath of Almighty God.

Until the Lord returns, all of us will die some day. About four years ago I was sitting in my study when the phone rang. One of my members called to tell me that her boss, who was a mutual friend, had suddenly died of a massive heart attack. Don Streit was forty-six years old and he had eight children. Don had no history of illness, so far as I am aware. He had absolutely no idea that when he went to his Department's picnic that day that instead of going to his earthly home with his wife and children after the picnic he would instead go to his heavenly home with God before the day was done. It was so quick. It was so unexpected. It was so unplanned.

But despite his sudden death, the good news is that Don was ready. Don loved God. He had a clear and compelling testimony before the watching world that Jesus Christ was his Lord and Savior. And while we grieved that he was so suddenly and tragically struck down in death, we nevertheless had confidence that he went immediately into the presence of God because he loved God. God's good purposes for Don's life had been brought to fruition in bringing him home to heaven.

You must ask yourself today: "Am I ready to die? Is God working for my good because I love him? Or, am I presently under the wrath of God? Where would I go if I were to die?"

Children, do you love God? Don't say that you have a long life ahead of you and that you will make up your mind about God later in life. You don't know when God will call you to the Judgment Seat.

Few people plan to die. Most of us do not know the time when we will die. I urge you to be ready for death when it should strike.

And the only way to be ready for death is to respond to God's grace and love in faith and repentance. You must turn from your sin in repentance. You must put your faith in Jesus Christ alone. And then, and only then, can you be assured of God's steadfast love for you.

And all of that is part of the process that God uses to make his children more and more like Christ.

## **V. God Works for the Good of Those Who Have Been Called According to His Purpose (8:28f)**

The fifth and final unshakeable conviction we know concerning the process that God uses to make us more like Christ is that God works for the good of those **who have been called according to his purpose** (8:28f).

Our love for God is in fact a sign of God's prior love for us. The reason we love God is because he first loved us (1 John 4:10).

Because he first loved us, we **have been called according to his purpose**. And we then responded in love to his love and calling. But it first begins with God's love and calling.

Garrison Keilor, of *Prairie Home Companion* renown, recalls the childhood pain of being chosen last for the baseball teams in his account of Lake Wobegon:

The captains are down to their last grudging choices: a slow kid for catcher, someone to stick out in right field where nobody hits it. They choose the last ones two at a time—"you and you"—because it makes no difference. And the remaining kids—the scrubs, the excess—they deal for us as handicaps. "If I take him, then you gotta take him," they say.

Sometimes I go as high as sixth, usually lower. But just once I'd like Darrel to pick me first and say, "Him! I want him! The skinny kid with the glasses and the black shoes. You, c'mon!" But I've never been chosen with much enthusiasm.

Did you ever think about the fact that God chose you early—and with enthusiasm! Paul says in Ephesians 1:4: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight."

God has loved you and called you from *before* the creation of the world! God has a redemptive purpose in all that he does. And everything that then happens in this life is working out **according to his purpose**. Therefore, we should, with John Stott, be convinced as Christians that "life is not the random mess which it may sometimes appear." No. God's plan is to make you more and more like Christ.

## Conclusion

These are the five truths about God, which, Paul writes, **we know**. We do not always understand what God is doing, let alone welcome it. Nor are we told that he is at work for our comfort. But we know that in all things he is working towards our supreme

good, which is to make us like his Son. And one of the reasons we know this is that we are given many examples of it in Scripture.

For example, Joseph was cruelly sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt. But, this was Joseph's conviction which he said to his brothers after many years of hardship and suffering: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20).

Similarly, God said through the prophet Jeremiah to the Jews in Babylon after the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem: "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (Jeremiah 29:11).

Our ultimate goal in life is to glorify God. And one of the ways in which we bring glory to God is by becoming like Christ.

Romans 8:28 teaches us that God is at work in our lives making us more and more like his Son: "**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.**" Amen.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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## Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

*Answers for Life!*

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: [Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org](mailto:Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org)

Web site: [www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org](http://www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org)