

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:
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Romans 8:26-28 “God Himself Working in our Lives”

Intro. Our text begins with the word “likewise.” We have to look back to the context to discover the connection here. Beginning in v.17 Paul has been writing about the reality of suffering, even for those who are children of God and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We suffer because we still have to live in a world of suffering.¹ We still have to live in bodies that are subject to suffering. We also suffer at times due to persecution for our faith. But we are not to be defeated by the suffering that is so common in this world. We should not become discouraged, fearful and frustrated. Instead, I shared with you last Sunday that we should overcome suffering with the right perspective, and with a sure hope of a glorious future. Then, we can maintain peace and joy regardless of the suffering and circumstances we face in life.

In our text today, we see that we not only face suffering, but we also are reminded of our own weaknesses as we face the difficulties and perplexities of life. When Paul mentions “our weaknesses” in v.26, it would seem from the rest of the verse that the weaknesses that he has in mind are not physical, but spiritual. We tend to want to believe that we can handle the problems of life on our own. Then, these problems tend to overwhelm us, and we finally confess we are too weak to handle them on our own. We need help!

Well, I have good news for you. If you trust God, He is ready and able to help you with the problems you face. Psalm 46:1 says, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Psalm 121:1-2 says, “I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.” In our text today, we will consider two of the ways God helps us in times of trouble. We will also see how God can give us confidence as we face the future. Are you worried about the future? The future may look bleak for this world, but not for the child of God. The knowledgeable Christian understands that absolutely nothing will interfere with our ultimate destiny of glory in heaven.

Now let’s begin by considering two of the ways God helps us as we face the problems of life. First of all:

I. GOD HELPS US BY HIS SPIRIT

Now because of our weaknesses, God has given every believer the Holy Spirit to indwell us (8:9), and to help us. Paul says in v.26, “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness....” The word translated “helps” gives a word picture. It literally speaks of the action of a person coming to another’s aid by taking hold of the load opposite that person.² Even so, the Holy Spirit indwelling the saint comes to the aid of that saint in his spiritual weaknesses and difficulties, but not by taking over the responsibility for them. He does not give the saint an automatic deliverance without any effort on his part. Instead, the Holy Spirit lends a helping hand in the ways we will talk about.

We need the Spirit’s help to overcome one particular weakness that we have. One thing good about our trials is that they tend to drive us to prayer. Yet so often, as v.26 says, “we do not

¹ Jesus said in John 17:15, “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.”

² The Greek word is made up of *sun*, “together with,” *anti* “over against,” and *lambano*, “to take.”

know what to pray for as we ought” as we face the trials of life.³ Should we pray for immediate deliverance? Or does God have some purpose to accomplish through this suffering?⁴ In any given situation we may not know what is best for us. We can’t see into the future and our insight into God’s will is far from perfect.⁵ So as you see in vv.27-28, on our own we might pray for deliverance for something that God actually intends for our good.

You recall that the apostle Paul had some affliction that he called a “thorn in the flesh.” He asked God three times to take it away. Then God revealed to him that he had permitted that affliction to accomplish His own purposes and his life to promote humility and dependence. He learned from experience his own weakness in not praying as he ought.

So in what way does the Spirit help us in this regard? The answer is found in the last of v.26, “the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” The verb rendered “intercedes” (*huperentugchano*) is a picturesque word of rescue by one who “happens on” (*entugcanei*) one who is in trouble and pleads to another “on his behalf” (*huper*). In such prayer the indwelling Spirit prays and intercedes to the Heavenly Father on our behalf.

But what is the meaning of the words “with groanings too deep for words”? Literally it (*alalantos*) can be translated “with wordless groans.”⁶ Some commentators believe that the wordless groans are coming from us, and the Holy Spirit is interceding in response to these wordless groans. That could fit into what Paul has just said, that there are times when we do not know how to pray, and all we can do is just groan under a sense of need. On the other hand, I believe it is more likely that the Spirit Himself is groaning over the sufferings of His people. Paul has already said that *we* were groaning in v.23. Then he said in v.26, “Likewise ... the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” The Spirit is also groaning over the sufferings of His people and comes to our aid with intercession. Likewise, Jesus groaned and wept at the grave of Lazarus (John 11:33, 38; cf. also Mark 7:34). If God the Son groaned over suffering and death, why shouldn’t God the Spirit also groan? Aren’t you glad that God the Spirit and God the Son are clearly sympathetic to the problems we face in life? After all, in 12:15 Paul commands us to “weep with those who weep,” following the very example of God!

Now I want you to understand what a great help the Holy Spirit is. In v.27 we see that the Spirit’s intercession is highly effectual. Why is that? Well God the Father surely hears the intercession of the Spirit. And even though the Spirit intercedes with wordless groans, that is no obstacle for God the Father. Paul says in v.27, “And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit...” “He who searches hearts” is none other than God the Father. Jer. 17:10 says, “I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind...” (NKJV). God even knows your innermost thoughts. He knows if you are reflecting on the sermon or if your mind is on something else. The Holy Spirit’s intercession cannot escape the omniscience of God. Besides, we read elsewhere of communication within the Godhead (Gen. 1:26; 11:7), which doesn’t require human language. God understands the wordless communication of the Spirit. Even husbands and wives engaged in wordless communication that is well understood. At times all it takes is a certain look!

Furthermore, we know that the Spirit’s intercession will be heard with approval for another reason given in the last of v.27, “because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of

³ The definite article is used before the word “what.” Paul says, “We do not know *the* what we should pray for, the particular what.”

⁴ However, we need not suppose that the weakness in view is restricted to the matter of prayer. His assistance in prayer is simply singled out as a specific example (vv. 26b, 27).

⁵ However, Romans 12:1-2 indicates that *if* we meet the conditions, we can “discern what is the will of God...”

⁶ Paul clearly is not talking about some tongue prayer language, for he specifically says this groaning is without words of any kind.

God.” We know from 1 John 5:14-15 that prayer according to God’s will is heard and approved, “And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.”

This verse in Romans has meant a lot to me over the years. For the most part, as I have sought to live a godly life, my life has been very good. But I have also walked through some deep valleys that you do not know about. Things have happened that I did not understand. For example, my dear mother died of a brain tumor when she was just 70. My dear sister died a tragic death when she was only 50. My trials would always drive me to my knees, and I would cry out, “God, what is going on? Where are you?” At times I just didn’t know how to pray. But I would remember this verse, and just turn it over to the Holy Spirit. And He always interceded on my behalf, and God the Father heard the Spirit’s intercession, and helped me through those trials. Looking back, I can see many evidences of the hand of God at work in my trials.

So the next time, dear Christian, you are in one of those difficult situations in life, remember that the Holy Spirit will help you pray through it to victory. Just be willing to say with the Lord Jesus, “Not my will but yours be done.” But remember, the Spirit only helps us; He doesn’t completely take over. We are also to keep praying and keep trusting in God. It’s just good to know that you are not praying alone, and the Spirit will help when you just don’t know what to pray.

So we have seen that God helps us by His Spirit. Furthermore:

II. GOD HELPS BY WORKING PROVIDENTIALLY

Our lives are not the haphazard result of the moving of blind chance and fate. Here God promises to work out all circumstances unto the good of His children. Paul says in v.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.” God not only helps us by the Spirit’s intercession, but also by His providence. God has a purpose for your life, and He has a purpose for what He allows into your life. Now let’s examine one of the greatest promises of the Bible. First, notice:

A. The Meaning of this Promise – The word translated “work together” (*sunergeo*) in every other occurrence in the New Testament means to work together in partnership.⁷ I believe Paul is saying that God is working in partnership with the circumstances of life to accomplish His good purpose.

Now what is this “good” that God is working in your life? *We* may define good as that which brings us comfort and happiness. In fact, some make application of this verse by saying that if you lose your job God will give you a better job. That is not necessarily the case. You see, the good that God promises is not what is good from a human or worldly perspective, but from God’s perspective. The word translated “good” (*agathos*) refers to what is intrinsically and morally good and not just things that are outwardly good or well pleasing to the eye (*kalos*). The specific “good” that God is working out is for us to enjoy the benefits of being children of God, as given in the context and elsewhere in Scripture. That *can* even include earthly blessings that provoke thanksgiving (1 Tim. 4:3-4) and praise to God. Yet the ultimate good is spelled out in vv.29-30. In short, it is that God’s people shall become like Christ and be glorified with Him. Based on the

⁷ For example, Mark 16:20 says, “And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them...” (see also 1 Cor. 16:16; 2 Cor. 6:1; Jas 2:22).

context and other Scriptures I can say with confidence that suffering is one aspect of our lives that God will use to make us more like Jesus. So if becoming like Christ is the ultimate good, then we will see how indeed all things work for good in the believer's life, including suffering. And some of the good that God is working out will not even be experienced in this life but in the one to come, such as a greater eternal reward (Mt. 5:11-12).

Furthermore, notice with me:

B. The Completeness of this Promise - Here God declares that "all things" work for our good, even suffering and adversity. He is not saying that all things *are* good, but all things *work* unto good.

Since "all things" work for good, then that includes the problems and trials of life. Every problem has a purpose. We have already seen an example of how God works through our suffering to bring about good in our lives. In Romans 5:3 Paul said that "we rejoice in our sufferings...." How is that possible? He went on to explain, "suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces and produces hope." (See also James 1:2-3; 1 Pet. 5:10). Yet too often, we are too concerned for our comfort, when we should be concerned for our character. Suffering works for our good as we are prompted to turn to God in prayer. Furthermore, hope and faith in our sovereign God produces peace of mind.

The Protestant reformer Bernard Gilpin, falsely accused of heresy, set out for London for trial. His favorite maxim was, "All things are for the best." On his journey, he broke his leg. "Is all for the best now?" jested a scorners. "I still believe so," he replied. And so it proved, for by the time he was healed enough to resume his journey, the Protestant persecutor Queen Mary died. And instead of going to London to be burned, he returned home in triumph.⁸ God can indeed use bad circumstances for our good.

A physician or surgeon may prescribe a course of treatment which at the time is unpleasant or even painful. Yet the wise physician knows that the short-term discomfort will bring better health in the long run.

God is not only able to work the bad circumstances of life for our good, but He is even able to turn the sins of others for our good. Joseph's brothers yielded to the sins of jealousy and hatred toward Joseph, even to the point of murder. When Ruben intervened, they decided to sell him as a slave and Joseph ended up in Egypt. He suffered many hardships down there, including imprisonment. Yet after several years God so worked in his life that Pharaoh exalted Joseph to a position of great authority. Then back in Palestine Jacob and his family suffered in a famine. God used their suffering to make connection with Joseph down in Egypt, as they sought to buy grain. They did not recognize him, and Joseph did not reveal himself. He ordered that Simeon be taken prisoner, as security for them to return with their little brother Benjamin. When Jacob heard that the ruler wanted to see his youngest son Benjamin, he exclaimed, "All these things are against me" (Gen. 42:36; NKJV). Have you ever felt that way? He may have felt that way but that is not the way it was. You see, after it was all said and done, Joseph ended up saving Jacob and his family from famine and they lived in Egypt with him. In time they prospered and grew into a mighty nation. So Joseph assured his fearful brothers, "you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Gen. 50:20). Romans 8:28 is not a new revelation. Its truth was first revealed way back in the days of Joseph!

⁸ Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: #6846* (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Publishers, 1979). See other illus. #6862-6916.

And, of course, the crowning illustration of the way in which evil acts may work together for the good of others is seen in the culmination of all the evil that poured out against the sinless Son of God. The leaders of Israel were filled with jealousy and hatred of Jesus. They conspired with the Romans to have Him unjustly put to death on a cruel cross. Satan meant for the death of Christ to be his ultimate and angriest thrust at the heart of God. But God turned it into salvation for multitudes when Christ died for our sins.⁹ Indeed, “all things work together for good.”

Furthermore, notice:

C. The Confidence This Promise Gives – As you face trials and suffering in life, will you face those trails with confidence, or will you be crushed by those trials? If I did not have faith in an all-knowing, all-wise, all-powerful, sovereign, and loving God, I could not face life with confidence and hope. But that is not the case. Notice how this verse begins, “And we know....” When you know such a God and that He has a plan and purpose for the problems He allows in your life, this knowledge can give you confidence and peace because you know that He is going to work it all out for our good.¹⁰

This means that nothing can touch us until it has passed through the will of God. Demons could not touch even a herd of swine until they secured permission from the Savior (Matt. 8:28-32). Aren’t you better than swine? We learn from the book of Job that the devil could not touch Job’s family, property, and health till he received permission from God. Thus, no power of evil can touch the child of God unless God is able to work it for our ultimate good. What assurance!

So child of God, when you face trials and difficulties, don’t get down and depressed and say, “All these things are against me.” Look up! And speak in faith that God is going to work out all things for your ultimate good.

Ah, but it is very important that we understand also:

D. The Condition of this Promise - This great promise is not given to everyone. Note is it only given to believers who are described in 2 ways:

1. Those Who Love God - The words, “for those who love God” is placed in the position of emphasis, as reflected in the ESV. Again, this is more of a description of the true children of God than a condition for the promise.¹¹ So can you say that you really love God? That is the greatest commandment. One test of love is obedience (Jn. 14:15). Another test is that you love God’s people (1 Jn. 5:1-2). Do you express your love to God with regularity, even in times of bad circumstances?

Yet our love for God is only a fitting response to the love of God for us (1 John 4:19). So Paul is sure to add another description of the true children of God:

2. Those Who Are Called According to His Purpose - The “called” here are not those called in the general sense, such as when Jesus said, “many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt. 22:14; cf. 2 Th. 2:14). Rather, it is those that are called with an “effectual calling” (cf. 1 Cor. 1:24). Paul also refers to this call in v.30. Indeed, there are two calls—the one is an outward gospel call intended for all. The other is an inward call that produces life in a believer.

⁹ Isa. 53:11 says, “Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous....”

¹⁰ Grammatically “all things” may be either subject or object of the verb “work together”; it is more probably the object. The subject will then be “he”, which some ancient texts make more explicit by the addition of the nominative “God.” After all, only God can cause “all things” to work for our good.

¹¹ Likewise, 1 Cor. 2:9 speaks of “...what God has prepared for those who love him.”

So have you responded to that inward call of God to become one of His children? If God is calling you to salvation through this message today, you can be saved. You can be among those whom God is going to work all things for our good. In fact, if you are among those who have been effectually called of God and responded with love for God, I'm sure you can look back and see the things that you thought were disasters that worked out for your good.

Ah, but I must warn you that all things work for bad to all others. Let's say you get a new job that pays a lot more money. You say, "That's good." No, for if you become prosperous it can harden your heart and lead to pride, and you will be less likely to sense a need for God in your life (see Dt. 6:10-13). Or suppose an unbeliever graduates with an advanced degree. You say, "That's good." No, it can work for bad if that education lifts your heart with pride. If you have good health, you may say, "That's good." No, you it can work for bad if you are less likely to feel the need to look up to God. If an unbeliever gets a chronic sickness, only bad is likely to come of it, for he may become bitter against God in his suffering. There is only one time when the circumstance of life work out for good for the unbeliever, and that is when those circumstances lead you to Christ. Is there someone here today who has come to church because you are going through a rough time right now? Can't you see that God is working through your circumstances to bring you to Jesus? Is He calling you to enter into a saving relationship with Him?

Indeed, sometimes God works through bad circumstances to call us into a saving relationship with Him. In my previous church we had a fine deacon who had an impact on the lives of many in our church and community. His name was Ralph Burgess. He was saved after his second child died shortly after he was accidentally run over in the driveway by his best friend who had stopped to pick up Ralph for work. Could anything be worse than that? Broken-hearted, he and his wife Jo turned to the Lord as a pastor came to comfort them. He told them of the time King David lost a child, but then said, "I shall go to him, but he will not return to me" (2 Sam. 12:23). He was saved and began to follow the Lord fully, and it wasn't long before he was ordained a deacon. He became a fine Sunday School teacher. He raised his 4 remaining children in church and built a Christian home. One of his sons became a faithful pastor. Another became a deacon. Both of his daughters became faithful Christians, and most of his grandchildren continue to be dedicated to the Lord. God turned tragedy into triumph for him and his family!

Conclusion: It is so wonderful to know that you do not have to live life alone. God is always there to help those who love Him, and who believe in His Son Jesus. The Holy Spirit will help you by interceding on your behalf. God Himself will work all things for your ultimate good.

However, these promises are only for those who respond to the call of God, and who love God. Right now God is calling someone to repent of sin, believe in His Son Jesus. Will you respond to the call? Will you turn from the love of sin, and turn to Jesus, and begin to truly love God? Do it today without delay. Don't live another day without the blessing of knowing that God is working in your life.

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letter to the Romans* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957); Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 3, "God's Heirs" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Bruce Corley & Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint); H.A. Ironside, *Lectures on Romans* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers 1928); John MacArthur, Jr., *Unity in Action: Study Notes on Romans 14:1-15:13* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1987); Leon McBeth, *Exegetical & Practical Commentary on Romans* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1937); Douglas J. Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary: Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); John

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Theology of the Text: The Holy Spirit is given to help our weaknesses and to intercede on our behalf according to God's will (vv.26-27). God all things work together for good (v.28), but only for His people.

Human Need of the Text: We have spiritual weaknesses, including not knowing how we should pray, especially in regard to suffering. For example, should we pray for deliverance or the strength of perseverance? Based on God's ultimate purpose stated in v.29, His will is often perseverance rather than a quick deliverance.

God's Redemptive Work of the Text: God helps our weaknesses with intercession by the Spirit and he works all things together, not just for our good, but also to accomplish the good of His glory.

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