

GOD'S PURPOSE FOR MY LIFE

Romans 8:28-31

Today, I'm glad to see you all. We're continuing our series on "Power to Change".

One of the basic truths that every believer needs to understand is What is God's Purpose for My Life? When you understand what His purpose for your life is, then you're going to understand why He allows difficult circumstances in your life.

Last week we had a Labor Day message which was a break from this series but the week before that we looked at Finding Hope to Hang On based on Romans 8. We're now continuing in Romans 8. In fact, we're on the last few verses of Romans 8 and these last few verses of Romans 8 build to a climax. Today's message is entitled "God's Purpose for My Life".

Let's read together Romans 8:28-31.

"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. 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. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?"

The passage we're going to look at today is one of the most familiar passages in the Bible. We're going to look at God's promise in v. 28, His purpose in v. 29, His process in v. 30 and then our response to all of that in v. 31.

So, let's look at

I. GOD'S PROMISE

Let's read Romans 8:28 again. "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."

Folks, this verse can sustain you through a lot of trials, a lot of difficult experiences. R. A. Torrey called this verse, "The soft pillow for a heavy heart." Now, what doesn't this verse say?

It does not say all things are good. Obviously, there is a lot of bad in the world. This is not a Pollyanna verse that says all things are good. It says all things work together for good. It does not say all things work out the way I want them. We'd like for it to say that but that's not what it says. It does not say all things have a happy ending here on earth. We try to make it say that but it doesn't say that.

But what does it say? "*And we know...*" The word know is used thirteen times in the book of Romans. It doesn't say, And we hope, or And we wish/want/desire/guess. It says "*we know*". This word means absolute, unshakable confidence. If you're going to learn to make it through trials it's going to be on the basis of what you know. Why is it two people can have the same problem: One grows through it and the other is destroyed by it. It's the difference between what you know.

Paul says what you know in this verse makes a difference on how you handle the difficulties in life. "*And we know that in all things ...*" He doesn't say "almost everything" but "*all things*". What is included in the word "all"? Does that mean financial problems? Illnesses? Relationship problems? Any kind of difficulty in the world? That about covers it! Does that include good things? Yes! We tend to think this verse is just for the bad things.

"We know that in all the bad things God works for the good." But not just in all the bad things, in all the good things too. In everything, God works! In King James Version it says "*all things work together*" and I like that because circumstances do not often bring good in themselves. Individually a crisis here or

there may not bring good, but all things working together... It's like baking a cake. You use flour, oil, sugar, eggs. Individually... how would you like to take a big bite of lard? or flour? It's not too tasty. But together it can create something good. All things work together. They are working for the good.

How do we know that all things work together? God says so. Why do they work together? The verse right before this, *"And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God."* (Romans 8:27) God, the Holy Spirit, prays for you. The reason why all things are working together is the Holy Spirit is praying for you. It helps to have God praying for you. Isn't it strange... God praying. But the Bible says He talks with Himself about His believers, His children. The Holy Spirit is praying for us according to His will and He's using it all to work. Good things and bad things, light and dark, sunshine and rain. Take the example of a needlepoint: If you look at the top of needlepoint or embroidery it's a beautiful picture; you flip it over and you see the jumble of threads and knots. A lot of times in God's tapestry we only see the underside -- just a jumble of threads. But God sees the beautiful picture that He's creating. He's working it all together. We know that all things work together for good. God works for the good. The specific good is spelled out in v. 29.

Can God even use sinful things, the results of sinful acts in this plan for good? He can. God even takes the mistakes I makes and somehow turns them around and brings good out of them. That's because God is God. God doesn't cause the mistakes, errors and sins in the lives of people but He uses them. He knows in our sinful nature He can take bad situations and has a great way of bringing good out of bad.

Look at Matthew 1. I'll bet you have never heard a sermon on the genealogy of Jesus. Notice one thing about the genealogy of Jesus. In Jewish genealogies you

never mention women. Only the men got mentioned. But interestingly enough in Jesus' genealogy four ladies get mentioned. v. 3, Tamar. In Genesis 38, Tamar seduced her father in law and that's where her kids came from. Was that good? No. But look what happened. She's in the genealogy of Jesus. Then Rahab, a harlot. Then Ruth, a Moabite woman who married a Jew. Then even Bathsheba a married woman who had sexual relations with another man. They're all in the lineage of Jesus. Again, can God bring good out of bad? He has a way of turning it around.

God never wastes a circumstance -- never, in the life of a believer. He always has a purpose. Maybe some of you were born out of an illicit relationship. Big deal! This chapter 1 of Matthew points out that God's purpose is greater than any sin. God is in the business of bringing good out of bad.

Now, Romans 8:28 is a promise only for believers. All things do not work together for good for unbelievers. In fact, all things work together for bad for unbelievers, The Bible says in **Romans 6:23 "The wages of sin is death."** If people are openly rebelling against God, He's not promising to work all things out for good. But what He is saying is that if you are a child of God, nothing comes into your life by accident. Everything is Father-filtered. God overreaches everything Satan does and uses it for His own purpose, even the mistakes we make and even the problems.

That is God's promise. Now, let's look at

II. GOD'S PURPOSE

Many people stop at verse 28. But Romans 8:28 makes no sense at all unless you read 8:29. It says, **"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."** 8:29 is the reason 8:28 is such a great promise, yet many

people skip it. 8:29 is the purpose behind 8:28. What is God's number one purpose in your life?

Let's go back to the very beginning, a very good place to start, Genesis 1. You see, God's purpose has never changed. From the beginning of time God's purpose has never changed. *v. 26-27 "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."* God, from the very beginning of time, wanted to make every human being in His image. Today, God's number one purpose in your life is to make you like Jesus Christ.

He says, *"Let us make mankind in our image."* He didn't say, Let us make other gods. He doesn't want us to be gods, He wants us to be godly and have God's character qualities, to be like Him in His character. But something happened. Adam sinned. That's called the Fall and the image was marred, blemished. Then when Adam had a child it says it was in his own likeness. Not the image of God but Adam's likeness. So God sent Jesus Christ to earth to restore that image. God's number one purpose in my life is to make me like Jesus. All through Scripture (Eph 4:13, 1 Cor. 15:49, 2 Pet. 1:4, 1 John 3:2, Gal. 4:19). God wants to make you like Jesus.

Notice one thing too. God's purpose is to make you a male or a female only. There's no other gender beside male and female. Human beings are binary, not non-binary. If you think you are non-binary, you are out of God's will. You need God, not surgery. There is not a mention of non-binary in the Bible. I thought I'd just mention that because in this woke culture that is pervading this country, so much deception is occurring. Even innocent children are becoming victims of this wokeism. These woke people, they should wake up. It makes no sense and it's

cruel to perform unwanted and irreversible surgery on children who don't know what they want. European doctors recognize the absurdity of this because of science. In the States, which is supposed to be an advanced country, they ignore science because of politics and misplaced values. There's so much to say about this but I think it will take one whole sermon. I'm just livid about this ridiculous situation in this country.

Anyway, going back to our topic, one of the traps of the Christian life is conformity. God doesn't want you to conform to other people but to Jesus. Again, going back to wokeism, you know why many kids now are confused with their gender identity? It's because they want to conform. They see it in social media, in TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Bud Light. It's hogwash when people say more children are becoming aware now of their gender identity because of a more affirming society. It's social media, not social affirmation. Anyway, let's go back to our topic.

God wants to make you like Jesus. God's number one purpose in your life is not to make you happy, wealthy, or keep you in perfect health. His purpose is to make you conformed to the likeness of His Son, to make you like Jesus Christ.

The natural question then is, How does He do it? The Scripture says that God uses two things to make us like Jesus. One, He uses His word, the Bible. John 17:17, Jesus says, *"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."* Sanctification is a big term that means the process of making me like Jesus. You see, the more you spend time with God's the more you become like Jesus.

The other way God makes us like Jesus is through circumstances. Difficulties, trials, common experiences, problems, pains, pressures, frustrations. That's what Romans 8:27-28 is all about. In 1 Peter 1:6-7, we see that trials refine us. They test us, prepare us, deepen and build character in our lives.

God knows every situation you're going through and God cares. He can change it but more than just interested in what you're going through, God is interested in how you respond. He wants you to learn to respond to every situation the way Jesus did. How did Jesus respond to every situation? He praised God, He thanked God, He rejoiced. How do I know? Because **1 Thes. 5:18 says, "In everything give thanks for this is the will of God."** And Jesus always did the will of God. I know that in everything, He gave thanks.

Folks, God's promise is that all things in your life will for the good. Because his ultimate purpose is to make you like Jesus. Now, let's look at

III. GOD'S PROCESS

What is the process? **v. 29-30 says, "And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."** There are five great terms in v. 29-30 used to describe the scope of God's purpose. Let's look at these five words that define the process of God's growth in our lives.

1. Foreknew. v. 29 "those God foreknew". That's the first step. Foreknowledge. This is a debatable word that many people have argued about. Calvin said that this means that God chose you in advance. Wesley said God simply knew in advance. There's a lot of controversy over this word among great Bible scholars. I think it's both. God knew in advance. God knows everything. There is no past, present, or future with God.

The Bible says he is the author of our lives. An author is someone who writes a book. He knows the beginning and the end. And we, the characters in the book, don't know what the next chapter will be. But God knows.

1 Peter 1:2 talks about that we were chosen according to the foreknowledge of God. God knew in advance when you would choose Him. He knew that you were going to become a Christian, because He has foreknowledge.

2. The second step is the word "predestined" v. 29 "*those God foreknew he also predestined*" Predestination is based on foreknowledge. Don't get scared of this word. It simply means that God made a decision about you ahead of time. It's the same word we get our word "horizon". It has a preposition in front of it that literally means "prehorizon" or to define the limits or boundaries. God chose in advance. John Scott says that the purpose of predestination wasn't favoritism but holiness, Christ-likeness.

Then, it says "*predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.*" This verse doesn't even talk about Heaven or Hell. The word "predestination" is always used for believers only. It's never used in reference to unbelievers. There are some people that believe God predestined some people to heaven and some people to hell. If that were true why go out and witness, if everyone is either going to heaven or hell automatically? This is the excuse they gave to William Carey when he wanted to start world missions, "Young man, if God wants to save the heathen, He'll do it without you." Yet all through Scripture we're told to witness. In fact, any time somebody tells you that God predestined some people to heaven and other people to hell show them 2 Peter 3:9 "*He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish.*" What do you do with that verse? It's not God's will that people perish! Do people perish? Yes. Because God's will is not always done. That's why we have to pray, "*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*"

God's ultimate will is always done and that's what we're talking about here. What is God's ultimate will? Predestination's goal is not heaven, it's Christ-likeness. Predestination means that those who are believers God, in this context, predestines them to become like Jesus.

For example, Philippians 1:6 I think is one of the clearest statements on predestination, without using the word, in Scripture. Paul is writing to the Philippians who are already believers, "*Being confident of this, that he who began*

a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

Who is doing the good work? God. Paul is saying, I'm praying and I'm confident that God, who started something in you, will bring it to completion. That's what he's saying here: We're predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son.

Predestination means when God saves you He's going to see you through. We were predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son. What God starts in your life He finishes.

Now, here's the third thing in the process.

3. **Called.** V. 30, *"Those he predestined He also called."*

It simply means that God took the initiative in your salvation. God called you and you responded. You didn't take the initiative in your salvation, God did. **1 John 4:19** says *"We love because he first loved us."* God took the initiative. God called us. Then we responded to His call. It wasn't my idea to be saved. It was His idea. 2 Thes 2:13 gives a good example of that in Paul. He had no intention of being saved. He was on the road to Damascus. God called him in a very dramatic way.

The next step.

4. **Justified.** *"Those he called, he also justified."* We've already spent about 4 weeks on this word "justified" earlier as we studied through Romans. One easy way to remember it: **"just- as-if-I'd"** never sinned. It means a lot more than that but it means God makes you righteous, in perfect standing before Him. He makes me just-as-if-I'd never sinned. It means made right before God. Not because we deserve it but just because of His grace.

And the final step.

5. **Glorified.** *"Those he justified, he also glorified."* This is the final state, the ultimate triumph. There's a progression from conversion to consummation, an

unbroken chain reaching from eternity to eternity. God foreknew way back before we were born and He's going to glorify us in the future.

That is the process. The promise? God's working it all for good in my life. The purpose? Because He's making me like Jesus. How? Through these five stages of the process.

IV. OUR RESPONSE

Now, what should be my response? v. 31 *"What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?"* Our response is one of confidence. There is not a single situation in life that you cannot learn from if you'll just get the right attitude. Every situation in life will either be a stepping stone or a stumbling block. It will either make you bitter or better. The difference between bitter and better is the letter "i". I make the difference. It's my choice. How I choose to respond. Every disappointment becomes His appointment when we realize He's using it all for good in our lives.

It all boils down to our attitudes or right responses that you ought to have regarding the circumstances in your life knowing what you know. Since you know that He's using it all, not for your temporary happiness, but for your permanent growth and glory, what are the right attitudes? Let me share with you now the right attitudes towards suffering.

1. Trust. Have faith in God and His plan when you don't know why what is happening is happening. Romans 8:28 explains the unexplainable circumstances in life. How? I don't know what's going on but God does. If God knows what's going on, even though I don't, the issue comes down to trust. Do I really trust God in my life? Do I really believe that He's working in my life? We look at the moment but God looks at the overall picture. Just trust.

Prov. 37:5-6 says, "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun."

2. **Submission.** Submission is simply coming to God, like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and saying, "Not My will but Thine be done." Even Jesus had a difficult time accepting what was going to happen at the cross. It wasn't a picnic being crucified! He knew what it was going to be. And more than that He knew He was going to take the sin of the world on Him. But He said, "Father, not My will but Thine be done."

James 4:7 *"Submit yourself to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you."*

3. **Contentment.** 1 Timothy 6:6-8 Paul says, *"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that."* Does this mean I should never have any goals? The Bible teaches goal setting. Paul is saying, enjoy the present while you're striving to be better. Some people are never happy because as soon as they get to a certain stage or accomplishment or achievement then they've got something else. That's fine. You've got to have goals in life. But learn contentment in the situations.

4. **Thankfulness.** 1 Thes. 5:18. *"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."* It doesn't say for everything but in everything give thanks. That is God's will. That is what God wants you to do in whatever situation you're in. Good or bad situation. Just thank him because God can bring good out of it.

5. **Praise.** Phil. 4:4 *"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"* In Acts 16:25 it says Paul was singing songs in prison. He had an incredible positive attitude in every situation.

As a final thought, whenever you're going through a problem that you don't understand, instead of asking "Why?" ask "What?" Instead of saying, "Lord, why?" ask "Lord, what do you want to teach me? What do you want me to learn from the situation? What is here for me to learn?" It's OK to say Why? as long as you don't say "Why, me?" That's like saying, "Lord, of all people, why me?" I can imagine the Lord saying, "Why not you?" None of us get what we deserve in life. If we got what we deserved, none of us would even be here. Don't say why me but What? What do you want me to learn?