

The Gospel as it Really Is:
Romans simply Explained
All things work together for Good
Romans 8:28-39
October 17th 2025
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At first sight this image appears to be a serious car incident somewhere in New York. Perhaps a sink hole? Extensive vehicle damage, surely some injury to the occupants?

But alas, appearances deceive: I took this photo myself in London yesterday when visiting my son. We happened to pass the site of a movie shoot and everything was staged!

In your life and my life we will experience what seem on the surface to be harmful events—and this is where my illustration breaks down—things that cause us *real pain*—but today we learn from the scriptures the remarkable and comforting truth, that God is at work in and through those very hardships to bring about good - *“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)*

Sunday morning we are making our way through the clearest and most systematic exposition of the Christian message in the whole of the Bible, the book of Romans, for anyone who is new among us. I said in my home group this week that if I knew I was going to be stranded on a desert island and was only able to take one book of the Bible with me, I'd choose Romans, because it contains the Good News, more comprehensively than any other book!

In chapters 1-5 Paul has outlined the Gospel: God declares sinners righteous forever in his sight, through the life & sacrifice of his beloved Son, when they believe the Gospel! Salvation is a free gift to all who believe!

From chapters 6 to half way through 8 Paul tells us that in response to the gift of salvation we are to live a holy life in the power that the Spirit supplies.

And starting midway chapter 8, he brings us solace & comfort in the face of our suffering. Help in suffering is part of the Gospel message we preach to the world! “Believe the Gospel and God will give you hope in the midst of suffering!”

So far Paul has offered three helps:

1) *Sufferings are accomplishing perseverance and character and hope*, that was back in chapter 5, when he first touched on the subject. *“...we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character hope.” (Romans 5:3-4)*

We might not see this, but suffering is building in us perseverance and character and hope!

2) *Sufferings can't compare with glory to come*. The second relief, now in chapter 8, is that when

weighed in the scales of eternity, future glory in that world of joy far outweigh all our earthly sufferings: *“Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us”* (8:18)

Can I recommend “Heaven your real home” by Joni Ericksen Tada? (library) Many short chapters which will help you set your affections on things above.

3) *The Spirit helps us in our weakness.* The third consolation Paul gives is in our hearts. The Holy Spirit who lives within us helps us in our weakness, 8:26, Especially when we’re agonizing in prayer.

4) *We know all things are working together for good—even our suffering!* And today’s support in the face of real suffering, is that we can be confident, verse 28, that in all things God is working for our good, even in our suffering. God is making us a promise here, that through everything that happens to us in life, including the stuff we label “*bad*” - Paul urges us to cast the net wide, “in *all* things” - God is working for our *good*! Four bright diamonds to treasure when we find ourselves in the dark mines of earthly hardship.

Who is this promise for?

This promise is for believers, who are defined in two ways, first, as

“those who love God”

This is a delightful description of a believer: a believer is someone who loves God! The orientation of his heart has changed. Once indifferent to God, even hateful towards him, but now they love him! The German philosopher Frederick Nietzsche hated God. In the last days of his life he wrote blasphemous things about God and Christianity—and interestingly he went insane at that very same time: I am convinced that his hatred of God and his insanity were connected: God not be mocked.

Before we were converted we pushed God out of our thoughts, we never thanked him for his bountiful gifts, of life and home, work, health, but now that we have been born again we love him, because, as the apostle John explains, he first loved us. “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19) Do you love God? You say “My love is often weak and cold, but, yes I can say sincerely, “I love you O Lord my strength” (Psalm 18:1)

From our human perspective, a believer is someone who loves God; but from heaven’s perspective, a believer is someone who God has called: *“who have been called according to God’s purpose (or plan)”* Just as Peter and James and John were called by Jesus, “Come follow me!” So you I.

A Christian friend of mine said to me about these verses, “I’m so glad a believer isn’t defined here *only* by his love for God”: he felt his love for God was often so weak, so that if Paul had only said “in all things God works for the good of *those who love God*” he might not be included in the promise! He was glad that Paul also described a believer from God's perspective, as someone who has been called by God, because being called by God was out of his weak human hands!

This promise, this confidence, that in all things God works for the good, then, is *for believers*. If you are not yet a believer, you can become one even today. Perhaps you have wondered “how can I become a follower of Jesus?” Well, you must turn from your sins and believe the Gospel, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31)

What does this Promise mean?

So this promise is for believers, but in the second place, let’s ask: what exactly does the promise mean, that God is working for “the good” in **all** things including our sufferings?

How can God turn disease or famine, poverty or bereavement, doubt or disability, persecution or pain into something “good”?

Paul means two things here:

(1) In God’s general providence, he overrules evil in to bring about good.

The prime example in Scripture is Joseph. Lots of bad things happened to him, but God overruled all of them to bring about his good purposes. God’s plan for Joseph was to turn him into a Rescuer, a type of Christ, but along the way he suffered in many ways:

- His *dad* made a big mistake when he made him his favourite child and gave him a splendid coat—that made his brothers mad!
- *Joseph himself* made a big mistake by telling his family about his dreams- they were true predictions of his future greatness but he could have kept them under his hat! Made his brothers hate him even more!
- *Then his brothers* sinned against him by selling him into slavery
- *And then Potiphar* threw him in prison unjustly, where he languished for years because the chief cupbearer forgot to tell Pharaoh about his innocence!

Lots of suffering! But God overruled it all for good, to get Joseph to where he wanted him to be! And Joseph could see this; when years later, now as a very powerful politician in Egypt, in charge of food supplies, he met his fearful brothers, he was able to say to them “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). God overruled evil and brought about his good.

In general, then, God with his omnipotent power is overruling *all things* to bring about good. Do you & I believe this brothers and sisters? Do we believe that God has the power to take *even THAT* misfortune, disappointment or failure and turn it around for good?

*Take courage now you fearful saints
The clouds you so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head*

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense

*But trust him for his grace
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face*

*His purposes will ripen fast
Unfolding every hour
The bud may have a bitter taste
But sweet will be the flower*

But Paul is saying something even greater than that here: the “good” Paul is speaking of is not only general good in this life, but good in the life to come, salvation good. The greatest “good” we can ever possess is salvation. Paul is saying that all we pass through in this life is designed by God, to get us to heaven!

2) God will bring us safely to his good heaven

We tend to quote verse 28 in isolation, but Paul goes on to describe our salvation in verses 29 and 30

“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.”

God has a glorious salvation plan for you that stretched all the way back before time and extends forward into eternity, and everything in this life is designed to make sure your salvation is secure. Look, the golden chain of salvation Paul describes has five 24carrot links!

- God **foreknew us**—he knew us before we were born; in the Bible to know someone means to love them: before time began God loved us!
- And then (and this is still before time) he **predestined us**—he pre-determined our future. Because he loved us he decided what our future would be—he would make us like his Son which in turn would bring glory and honour to Jesus Christ
- Then, and this is now **in time**, God **called us**, we heard the Gospel one day and the Holy Spirit prompted us to respond in faith and repentance
- And then, **still in time**, we were **justified**, declared righteous in God's eyes, because of the perfect life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ
- And finally, and **this is in the future**, we will be **glorified**, we will possess new bodies like that of the Lord Jesus Christ and we'll dwell in a new heavens and new earth!

This is God's good plan of salvation for his people, and through everything that happens to us in life, in “all things” God working to accomplish this salvation for us!

Take your conversion, for example. How did it happen, when did it happen, through whom did it happen? In all those things God worked for your salvation good. A few weeks ago Aiden told us how one Sunday morning he came into this room and saw Matt one of his lecturers. And he thought to himself “if Matt with his science background believes in God then science can't be an obstacle to

faith.” The events of that morning were planned by God for Aiden’s salvation good.

Take for example your sufferings. Like the prodigal son, God has sometimes allowed painful circumstances in your life—you’ve had to feed pigs— to bring you back to him. You can say, to “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your commands.” (Psalm 119:67)

What an amazing truth, in which we should rejoice! Through everything in our lives—absolutely everything, nothing is excluded, God is working for our **general** good and for our **greater** salvation good, the salvation of our souls.

How should we respond?

Very simply, we need to believe this truth. That’s it.

Many years ago the Lord brought into our lives—just for a short season of time - a beautiful saint by the name of Eva. When I remember her dear face, I see lines upon it etched by both sorrow and by joy!

God brought Eva into our lives during a particularly difficult season. (Have you found that God sometimes brings a saint into your life just at the right time? And then they go? Perhaps to stop us depending upon them too much?)

Eva lost her husband to leukaemia, there was a misdiagnosis; within just a very short time he passed away. One of her children trained to be a nurse. On the way home from her first shift her car left the road and she was killed instantly. And then Eva herself got cancer of the brain.

By God's grace Eva was always joyful. How did she cope through all these sorrows?

She would say to us “I’m resting in the armchair of Romans 8:28” by which she meant that she was confident that *“in all things God was working for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”* (Romans 8:28)

May God increase our faith to believe this promise. Amen.