

Together for Good

Sometimes the end of the story is the most important thing...

Paul writes,

“And we know that God causes **all things to work together for good** to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purposes. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. What shall we say to these things? If God is for us who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:28-32).

It may not always seem that our struggles make sense, as William MacDonald writes,

“Sometimes when we are suffering heartbreak, tragedy, disappointment, frustration, and bereavement, we wonder what good can come out of it... whatever God permits to come into our lives is designed to conform us to the image of His son.”¹

First of all, we observe that these promises is only for those who love God and are the called.

Secondly, it doesn't say that all things will be good; rather, that God will work all things together for good. Previously, the apostle stated that the whole creation has been subjected to futility until Christ returns and restores the earth. Until then the environment will be against us, the animals will eat us, people will war against us, and the corruption will cause us to suffer.

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

A third consideration has to do with the purposes of God. Ultimately, this is what we would label “good”, that is, this is what it means from God's perspective to work all things together into “good.” God's plan is that we who love Him and who are “the called ones,” will become Christ-like in our character.

¹ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), p. 1712.

²⁹For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son,

We see four specific areas this Scripture covers:

Our Personal Situation

God's Present Intercession

God's Powerful Intervention

God's Ultimate Intention

I. Our Personal Situation

Paul stated the obvious in verse 18, '...the sufferings of this present time.'

Trials and tribulations have been the reality since the fall. "The whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now" (v. 22)

While still in the garden Adam was given the joyous work of tending the garden. But after the fall work became hard:

"Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you and you will eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground." (Gen. 3:17-19).

1). The first reason for trials is that we live in a **cursed creation**- polluted by sin, enslaved to corruption, ruled by Satan, subjected to futility, and dominated by death. Trials come because creation is cursed.

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned..." (Rom. 5:12)

2). Trials also come because of **discipline**. Paul wrote to the Galatians,

"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life" (Gal. 6:7-8)

Some of the difficulties we face are self-induced, or consequences of our own behaviors and attitudes.

Charles Stanley has stated it succinctly:

"We reap what we sow, later than we sow and more than we sow."

Because we are God's children, He disciplines us to produce godliness

“...He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.” (Heb. 12:10-11).

3). Sometimes trials come as a means of **prevention**. They are, in a sense, a spanking before we misbehave. When Paul was given a thorn in the flesh it was after the great spiritual experience of visiting heaven. He didn't know if it was real or in a vision, but it was so incredible that in order for him not to become proud he was given a thorn in the flesh to keep him humble.

“Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me – to keep me from exalting myself!” (2 Cor. 12:7).

Paul accepted the lesson:

Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecution, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2Cor. 12;10)

4). Trials also come to give us a close experience and **education** with God. Job is an example of a man who endured extreme trials, for no other reason than an education. The trials of education have no apparent, or earthly reason. They are allowed by God and have only one outcome, that we discover Him.

Job's life changed suddenly one day; he went from riches to rags, family man to no family, completely healthy to being sick unto death.

Behind the scenes:

The Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing god and turning away from evil.” (Job 1:8)

God's assessment of Job. – “No one is like him in the whole earth.”

Job's endurance

Satan's attacks first took away everything he had, then his health.

“Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And

he took a potsherd to scrape himself while he was sitting among the ashes. Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!" (Job 2:7-9).

Job's response:

Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord... Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God." (Job 1:20-22)

II. God's Present Intercession

Waiting with hope is the attitude of prayer as we trust God in the midst of trouble. Paul adds,

"In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that God causes all things to work together for good for those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:26-28).

When we are going through a great trial the most natural thing to do as believers is to pray. This promise is one that should give confidence in our weakness that the Holy Spirit is praying for us. As we pray, He prays 'according to God's good and gracious will for our lives.'

III. God's Powerful Intervention

God is the ultimate Cause in transforming our trials into good.

For we know -- That God causes -- All things -- To work together for good

Job answered God after four chapters of questions: [Chapters 38-41]

Then Job answered the Lord and said,

"I know that You can do all things,
and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.

'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?'

Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."

'Hear now, and You instruct me.'

I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear;
but now my eye sees You;

Therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:1-6).

In the same way when we see life from God's perspective we will see that everything God does is for our good, according to His will and purpose.

To work together – sunergeo – synergism, the working together of various elements to produce an effect greater than, and often completely different from the sum of each element acting separately.

"In the physical world the right combination of otherwise harmful chemicals can produce substances that are extremely beneficial. For example, ordinary table salt is composed of two poisons, sodium and chlorine."²

In the same sense God works all the hardships, pains, sufferings and difficulties together to transform us into Christ's image.

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren (v. 29)

God intervenes in our lives by using all things to shape us into the image of His Son, Jesus.

Christlikeness: Completely selfless, loving, sensitive to God, doing the Father's will

Project: discover what Christ was like...

God's Ultimate Intention; (next time – part 2)

² John MacArthur, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Romans 1-8, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), p. 473.