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What "All Things Work Together for Good" Actually Means

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Series: Future Glory
Romans 8:26-30

## BIG IDEA - GOD IS ACTIVELY WORKING THROUGH EVERY JOY, EVERY DISAPPOINTMENT, EVERY UNANSWERED PRAYER, AND EVERY SEASON OF SUFFERING TO ACCOMPLISH OUR ULTIMATE GOOD: MAKING US MORE LIKE CHRIST

You can open up your Bibles to Romans, chapter 8. If you're new, you came on the best Sunday you could come on. Here's why. We're in the greatest book in the world…the Bible. We're in the greatest book in the Bible…Romans. We're in the greatest chapter in Romans…chapter 8. We're in the best part of Romans 8. We're in the most famous section ever.

The problem is Romans 8:28 (and we'll get there in 15 to 20 minutes; we're going to start in verse 26) has become a Christian bumper sticker. Right? Some of you (it's okay) have Romans 8:28 in your Instagram bio. It's on a coffee mug. It's on a wall in your house, unfortunately next to "Live, laugh, love."

This is what has happened. What we've done is we've taken Bible verses completely out of their context. See, Bible reading and real estate have something in common. Location, location, location is what's most important. Let me show you what happens. Let's take a verse like Philippians 4:13. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Let's call it the "Tim Tebow verse," because everyone loves Tim Tebow. He's such a great guy.

Remember how he would have the black under his eyes and it would say "Philippians 4:13"? That verse is not about throwing a football. That verse is not about being a great quarterback, but he knows that too, probably. He's just doing that as an application of it. That verse is about Paul going, "Guys, I have learned the secret to contentment." Then he

said, "I've learned how to handle a lot and handle a little. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

You know that verse (you've quoted it; you've probably misquoted it) that says, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there Jesus is among us," which gives guys an excuse… You know, two guys get a beer and call it *church*. It's like, "Uh, I don't think that's what Jesus meant." That is actually about, "Hey, after you've confronted someone in their sin and they don't listen, take two or three witnesses, and I will be among you." Oh, so it's not about coffee-shop church; it's about confrontation of sin.

My favorite… And don't go to this version, because this verse in your version won't say this, but in 1984, when the NIV, which was the standard Bible forever… When it came out, this is what Psalm 56:1 said. Look at this. It said, ***"Be merciful to me, O God, for men hotly pursue me…"*** Now, this is not a verse about a dating app; this is a verse about King David being in danger, but you need to read the whole section to get the whole idea.

So, what we're going to do today is I'm going to read you the whole section. I'm going to read it slowly. We're going to read Romans 8:26–30. Just prepare yourself, because starting this week, we are about to get into the deepest section of Scripture. We're going to talk about things you've never thought of, and the first time you hear about them, they may even scare you a little bit. We're going to do this together. So, we're going to look at Romans 8:26–30. Here we go. I'll read it.

***"Likewise…"*** In other words, "Connected to what I just said." That's what Paul is saying from last week. ***"…the Spirit*** [the Holy Spirit] ***helps us in our weakness."*** We're going to talk about being weak today. ***"For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes…"*** So, the Spirit helps and the Spirit prays.

***"…for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."***

Then, here's verse 30. Paul summarizes it all. ***"And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."*** Okay. We're going to go back to verse 26 where it says, "Likewise, the Spirit is groaning, helping us in our weaknesses."

Now, let me remind you… This is the great thing about at least *our* church. Every week you come you know what I'm going to talk about. It's just the next verses, and it builds on

everything we just said. Last week, we saw that the creation groans. Earthquakes, tornadoes, volcanoes, floods, famines, droughts… The earth is groaning in the pains of childbirth.

Basically, here's what he says. When you look around you, everything around you is groaning if you can see it. Then he says, "Hold on. Not just the creation but the church, Christians." He goes, "We ourselves." Paul goes, "I know it's surprising, because we're God's children, and we're waiting for the spirit of adoption, but yes, in our bodies we groan for the redemption of our bodies." Then today he goes… Watch this. He's like, "Everything around you is groaning, and *you* are groaning, and God is groaning in you."

Basically… These are basic things, but you need to know them. God cares about you. God is not like a watchmaker, a "wind up the world and forget about you" kind of deist God. He's deeply invested and involved. In some sense, God is emotional. Obviously, we see this…Jesus weeping at Lazarus' tomb. We've talked about that before.

It's interesting. There's a phrase… We'll go deep. We're going to be all over the place today with theology…all good stuff. The first thing is people talk about the impassibility of God. I know it sounds like a procedure you're going to need to have, but it's called the *impassibility of God*. It basically has to do with God and emotions.

See, the problem with you and me is our emotions are all over the place. For some of you, there's a car commercial, and you're crying at the end of it. You're like, "I need a Honda." I mean, you're just not sure. But then you stand at a funeral and are like, "Why do I feel nothing?" Our emotions don't even… We're sad when we shouldn't be. We're happy when we shouldn't. We can't feel it. When it says God feels emotions, it means he feels them correctly and completely.

God comes alongside you, and it says he comes alongside you for… Here's the first reason. Do you see in verse 26? It says because we're weak. Now, if we can be honest, we have spent our entire lives trying to act like we're not weak. By the way, it's not a sin to be weak.

There's a big difference between sins and weaknesses. In marriage, you'll spend your whole marriage basically fighting over "Is this a weakness or is this a sin?" "You're not good at listening. Are you purposely not listening to me or are you terrible at listening?" One could be a sin; one could be a weakness. You get it.

Paul is not insulting you; he's diagnosing you. He's like, "Guys, every person who has ever lived is weak." I know you want to get your beach bod to show that you're strong. I know you want to show us your fake, filtered life to act like you're strong. I know you want to save as much money so you have this strength financially, but we're all weak, guys.

We are weak physically. I don't care how much collagen you put in your coffee. I mean, think about this. We're born not being able to lift up our heads, and most of us will die not being able to lift up our heads. It's humbling. Some of you, by the way, pulled a muscle putting your socks on today. You know you're weak. You realize, "Wait a second. I can miss my caffeine in the morning and it affects me. I can have one bad night of sleep and I feel it physically."

We feel it emotionally. I already talked about that. We're all over the place. We don't feel the right emotions. Sometimes you're upset at how upset you get. Then (this is what Paul is talking about today), we're weak spiritually, which means we can't do what God wants us to do by ourselves. We can't obey God by ourselves. We can't endure all the suffering by ourselves.

Look at what it says. I want to read this to you. I want you to see this. Verse 26: ***"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness."*** *All* of our weaknesses. ***"For we do not know…"*** By the way, he's going to first tell us what we *don't* know and then, in verse 28, what we know. ***"For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words."***

So, the Holy Spirit comes alongside of us because we don't know what to pray. It says he comes alongside of us with groanings too deep for words. Do you understand that there are certain things words can't get at? That is not encouraging to me, because I deal with words for a living. I get up here and speak for a living, and I believe in the power of articulated speech. I really do. I've seen it change lives.

What he's saying is there are just certain things… Like, go to the Grand Canyon, then come back and try to explain the Grand Canyon to someone who has never seen it. Or, hold your firstborn child in the hospital and try to explain what you're feeling. That would be the positive version. Or, stand at your mom or dad's graveside and realize that the rest of your life on earth you won't see them. The loss you feel and the closure…

By the way, this is why people read poetry. It's like, "Can someone try to put this into words?" This is why you watch movies. This is why you listen to music. This is why people stand and stare at artwork. Why do people do that? Why do people go to Washington, D.C., and stare at artwork for hours? They're like, "Words don't get it. I need a picture."

He's saying that the Holy Spirit comes. There's this wordless ache when we're suffering, and he comes alongside of us. By the way, here's a principle: when somebody is suffering, the deeper the pain, the fewer the words. You have to be like Job's friends. You sit down for seven days, and you don't say a word. Job's friends only became the villains once they started speaking. If somebody is suffering, here's what you need to think: bring

casseroles, not conversations. They need my presence more than they need some kind of prescription of what to do.

Now, here's what he says. Here's the problem with you and me: we don't know what to pray. Now, sometimes that's our problem because we just don't know the Bible well enough. I've told you this before. I'm not the greatest pray-er. If I have to pray alone by myself, it's going to be hard to pray for a long time, but if I have a Bible open, I can pray for a long time.

Because if you read the Bible… For example, the verses I gave you. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Then you think, "What are some areas in my life where I need Christ to strengthen me?" You'll pray for a while. And if you read through one of Paul's letters or some of Jesus' teachings or an Old Testament narrative, it'll give you a bunch of things to pray for.

Listen. That's when life is going well, or at least not horribly. That's in the mundane of life. This is what we're going to talk about for a few minutes. What do you do when life is really hard and you don't even know how to pray about it?

I've had many experiences, but I remember… This was years ago. I went down to go visit and learn from a church. The pastor of that church said… There was a group of pastors there that day. There were like 10 of us. He goes, "Hey, guys, we're doing a response time. We call it *elder prayer*. We don't have enough guys tonight. We're going to have you guys go out and pray for people as well." I'm like, "I'm a pastor. I can do this."

You know, I've never been to this church. I don't know anyone in this church. I'm standing up there. I remember this young girl comes forward, and she's crying. She's with her friend (they have to be in their 20s) and *she's* crying, and they're coming up to me together.

I get their names and introduce myself, and I say, "How can I pray for you?" She said, "I think I have schizophrenia." That was overwhelming to me, because I was like, "How do I pray for this?" Then she said, "And I think it has to do with my relationship with my dad." I don't even remember what I prayed.

Do you know those moments? Grandma is in the hospital. Do you pray for healing or do you pray for her to go home to heaven? You're single. Do you pray that you'd be like the apostle Paul and you're the most awesome single person for kingdom purposes and that actually you could say no to marriage and head in that direction with no regrets or do you pray for a spouse? Or do you pray for both?

What about infertility? There are a bunch of options. What do you pray? Do you pray that God miraculously opens up the womb, like he does in the Old Testament and New Testament? Do you pray that you would be open to adoption, and maybe that's what God is doing? Adoption is at the heart of the gospel, and maybe *that's* what you should do. Or do you pray, "Lord, are you trying to tell us that we're not going to have any kids in our home and, instead, all of our kids are going to be spiritual children and we'll invest in the church?"

Do you ever have someone just come up to you…? Maybe it's a young person. They have some type of cancer, and they're asking you to pray for them. Do you go, "Do I pray for a miracle or do I pray for really good medical treatment? Can I even pray…? Is it a miracle if it's medical treatment? Maybe what I should pray…"

Sometimes you're like, "Well, I don't want to…" This is what I'll feel like as a pastor: "I don't want to let them down. I don't want to pray for something that doesn't happen." So, then you add, "And I just pray they'd be comforted." Maybe the main prayer should be that they have comfort and stability during their cancer and intense chemotherapy treatment. Do you get what I'm saying?

Paul says when we get down on our knees, a lot of times, we don't even know what to pray, even when we have a Bible in our hands. It's like, "There are a lot of different verses I could go to, and I don't know how to pray for this person." I mean, we're tired of praying… How do you keep praying for your son who's not a believer? Do you pray that God brings some horrible storm into it? I mean, what do you do?

Well, Paul says the Holy Spirit comes alongside of us and he prays. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows the aches of our hearts, and somehow, in some mysterious way, he takes what's going on in our hearts… We don't have the words, and we don't know God's will, but he does, and he prays for us.

Now, that's really good, because when I did college ministry and we had to raise support, they would always tell you, "You need to find a great prayer team and some great prayer partners." Well, the Bible says Jesus is praying for us in heaven, and the Bible also says the Holy Spirit prays for us, so we have a great prayer team. Let me just say that.

It says what the Holy Spirit does is he helps us. Now, in our language, *help* is four letters, one syllable, a simple word. The Greek word for *help* here… I'm not even going to try to pronounce it, because… I worked on it, and I can't do it. It's just too many syllables. The whole point is… It's a helpful illustration. The word *helps* here means to come alongside and grab the other end.

Here's what God is saying. "There are too many things that are too heavy for you to carry alone. It's like this is a massive, heavy couch, and I don't care how strong you think you are; you're not carrying a couch alone." The Holy Spirit says, "Listen. I'm not going to leave you. I'm going to grab the other end of the couch, and I'm going to pick it up, and we are going to do this together," which is exactly what you need to know when you're suffering. God cares. God knows. God prays.

So, that's the beginning. That's the intro to Romans 8:28, the verse that's on everybody's wall. Let me show you this. Romans 8:28: ***"And we know…"*** Did you notice that? I love Paul. Paul goes, "We don't know what to pray." By the way, Paul put himself in that category, who wrote Scripture, saw Jesus, and was an apostle. He's like, "I don't know what to pray a lot of times." He goes, "We don't know what to pray, but here's what we *do* know."

***"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."*** Paul goes, "Here's what we know: God is working for our good." Now, Paul says, "We know God is working for our good, and he's doing it in all things." He doesn't say, "We know *how* God is working," because we don't. By the way, that's to keep us humble.

Do you understand how manipulative I could be? "Yeah, I know exactly what God is doing. Come here. Let me tell you exactly what God is doing in your life." There's a humility. None of us know what God is doing, and that's good. It doesn't even say you're going to *like* what God is doing. It doesn't say, "I will like how God works everything together for my good." It just says, ultimately, God is going to work everything together for our good.

Now, this is important. Here's why. Life is so tragic, terrible, painful, and sorrowful that every culture has had to have phrases that people hold on to. We don't have any good ones in America. So, here's what happens. Here's the best the secular world has to offer: "Everything happens for a reason." That's vague, ambiguous, and unhelpful. And who is "Reason"? He's doing a lot of work.

Here's another one: "The universe has a plan." Guys, the universe is floating rocks and burning gas. It's not thinking about you or me. Or karma. "What comes around goes around. Everybody gets what they deserve." Our faith is built on the exact opposite, that, thank God, we *don't* get what we deserve. We wouldn't want that.

Or, there is now the self-spirituality of manifesting. In other words, it's like a small version of "Name it, claim it." It's like the charismatic movement but in one person. "I will imagine and speak into reality what I want to have happen in the future, and that's

what's going to happen." People believe this, and I'm like, "How could anyone believe this?"

But then (true story) the other day I'm on Instagram. It knows my algorithm, so I've got this golf stuff coming up, and this lady is on this Reels video. You know how they look. They look right at the screen and point at you. She's like, "Do you want me to help you with your golf game?" So, I stopped the video, and I said, "Yeah." But first I checked how many subscribers she had. She had, like, 30,000 subscribers. She seemed legit.

She said, "Here's what you need to do. When you're on the golf course, you just need to say, 'I hit every fairway. I hit every green. I make every putt.'" She was like, "You just need to manifest it." I was like, "This is the dumbest thing ever." Then I was on the first tee. I was like, "I hit every fairway." I promise you. "I hit every green." It is a lie. It does not work. I want you to know that that's how people… People either get very vague or think they can do it themselves.

Let's take this phrase apart, because all three parts of it… So, "All things…work together…for our good." That's important. So, let's talk about *all things*. What makes this verse difficult is that it said *all* things. I think it would be easier for us to embrace if it said *good* things. It would be easier for us to embrace if it said *some* things. Maybe we could even get there if it said *most* things, because then there would be a category of things that we would say, "Not *this*."

The problem with *all* things is it's universal, it's global, it's all-inclusive language. It means God is somehow going to take all things and work them together for your good. That would include the diagnosis or the deliverance. That would mean the promotion or the pink slip. That would mean the wedding or the funeral.

When life is going well, you love this verse, because you're like, "I can see it right now. Everything is working together for my good." But when life is very, very hard you're like, "How does this work?" Well, here's what I want you to understand. There's a key phrase. "All things…" Here's the phrase: "…work together."

It's not saying any one thing that happens in your life is ever good. It's not calling cancer or chronic illness or death or divorce or betrayal *good*. It's not calling any of that good. I don't even believe it's saying you're supposed to look at one thing in your life and go, "God is going to take that one thing and turn it for good." That's where people get maddening.

Like, you lost your son at a young age. "Yes, God is going to take that one thing and use it for good." That's not how God works. According to this verse, God takes everything that's

happening in your life, including that one horrible thing, or the 10 or 15 horrible things, and he's going to work it all together.

Here's the way I think about it. My daughter Addy loves to bake. Most nights in the kitchen, she's baking some type of dessert last minute. I don't even know how it works. Grab the flour, grab the vanilla… I mean, they all taste so good. If it looks like I've gained some weight, this is why.

What's interesting is, if you think about it… And I'm not a cook or a chef or a baker, or whatever, but most ingredients by themselves are horrible. No one is sneaking a spoonful of flour. If you ever try baking soda, you only try it once. Raw eggs… I mean, there are a couple of you who work out and do that, but you shouldn't be eating raw eggs. Or vanilla… I mean, all of these things are not great, and by themselves, you're like, "Why am I even putting this in here?" Then you put it all together and stir it.

Here's why it's a great illustration. You put it in a baking pan or a sheet, and then you expose it to an enormous amount of heat, and afterward you're like, "This is the best pie [cake, brownies] I've ever had." That's what God is doing, but here's the key thing: you have to believe by faith all things are working together.

When I say, "All things are working together," you're taking the entire globe and all of human history and eternity. The problem is our view and vantage point is too small. Then it says, "…is working together for our good." I wish it said all things were going to work together for our *comfort*. I wish it said for our *happiness* or our *self-fulfillment* or our *safety*, but it says our *good*.

Now, let me show you the good defined. Look. The good defined is in verse 29. This is why we read Scripture out of context. "All things are going to work together for my good." What is my good? It's in verse 29. ***"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son…"***

*Our* good is circumstantial; *God's* good is Christ-centered. Here's the good. This actually works. If you're in the middle of suffering, I know this is hard, but you could take anything in your life and say, "You know what? By the grace of God, this could conform me more to the image of Christ."

There are four purposes for our suffering. The first is to be conformed to the image of Christ. Isn't it true that, as a general rule, the godliest people we know have suffered the most? We'd like to be as godly as them, but we wouldn't want to suffer as much as them.

I remember I was at Goler. That's our old building, two buildings ago. It was our first building, and we had these Sunday night services. We had all of these young people

coming around, and we had this young doctor coming. He was a resident. He was coming around with his wife. They were a beautiful young couple with a beautiful young family, but there was one thing I noticed about her the first time I saw her. She had one leg.

I had learned enough by being a pastor that you don't ask somebody like that or somebody who knows them, "What happened?" You always ask, "What's their story?" One of my friends knew her, so eventually I asked, "What's her story?" She said, "Oh, she was in a really terrible boating accident when she was a teenager." I said, "Really?" Then this is what I'll never forget. She said, "So she knows Jesus better than you and me."

I remember she told me that, and I got up and preached. I saw the young lady, and I thought, "I wonder how many times you've had to wrestle with Jesus about why you have one leg and why something that happened very quickly on one day is defining your life for the rest of your life. You *do* know Jesus better than I do."

The first purpose in your suffering is to conform you to Christ. The second purpose is to wean you from the world, which is also painful. As soon as you start severely suffering, your perspective will be completely different. By the way, every time you lose somebody you love, more of your heart is in heaven. So, when you meet somebody who's very old and all of their friends and all of their family and their parents… They've been weaned from this world.

The third purpose is to equip you for ministry. Here's what I want you to know. Some of you have a story of suffering that someone in this church needs to hear, because the darkest chapter of your life that you're now on the other side of is the page of the book they're on. Suffering people want to be ministered to by people who have suffered and, often, suffered in the same way.

One of our elders went through cancer. Probably more than one of our elders, but I'm thinking right now of one of our elders who went through cancer. What's interesting is not only almost every time someone in this church is diagnosed with cancer we call him to minister to them, but he *wants* us to. He will move anything. He will make time for it, because he has been through that valley. He knows what it's like, and he wants to be on the front lines helping others.

Finally, this is the unique Christian purpose, outside of being conformed to Christ. It's to display the greatness and glory of God. How do people see the glory of God in your life? It's very hard. It's hard when your life is going well, but when you love God more than what you're losing, it glorifies God. Pain and suffering are connected to loss, and that's what's the most painful for us.

So, here's what he says. All things are going to work together for your ultimate good, which God defines as being conformed to the image of his Son. We'll end in a moment with glorification. I want you to see with our time left what is called the *golden chain*. I'll read it to you and then make some comments. This is what's after verse 28. It starts in verse 29.

***"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."***

This is deep. Get ready. Community Group leaders, good luck for the next six weeks. We are going into the deepest section of Scripture. We are going to be talking about all of the big, scary words starting today…*predestination*, *election*. I mean, wait till we get to Romans 9. Romans 11 talks about a partial hardening that has come upon the people of Israel. I mean, we're going to be talking about things, I promise, most of you have never thought about before.

By the way, this is not… I mean, you can debate. That's fine. You can debate, discuss, and dialogue about all this, but you don't need to divide over it. What I'm going to begin to talk to you about right now is stuff that seminary students who are single and have too much time nerd out about until 2:00 a.m..

Here's what I want you to know about this. What I'm about to teach you (and what I've *been* teaching, what we *will* teach in a few weeks) is not really meant for the classroom but for the hospital room. When you talk about this in a classroom setting, everyone thinks, "Okay, hold on. Let me find my verses." Paul writes this to Christians who are dying, who are persecuted, and who are deeply suffering, and it's meant to comfort them.

So, this is what's called the *golden chain*. Here's what you need to notice. First, God is the subject. "Those whom he foreknew." Then it goes *foreknew*, *predestined*, *called*, *justified*, *glorified*. God is the subject of every verb. You are the basically passive object. By the way, there's one link that's missing. Did you notice that? Sanctification isn't mentioned. That's super important.

Sanctification, the process of becoming progressively and practically more like Christ. Why isn't that mentioned? Because you work together on *that* one. These are all just the things *God* does. So, let's unpack each one of these briefly. In the weeks to come, Paul gets more into them, and we'll get there.

First, it says God *foreknew* you. What does that mean? What does it mean that God foreknew me? Well, you could ask this. "At one level, doesn't God know everything about everything and everybody? Isn't that kind of what it means to be God? Like, is it that special for God to foreknow me if he foreknows everybody?"

So, what some people will say… And you can believe this if you want to, but I think you're wrong if you do. What some people think this means is God has… I mean, we always anthropomorphize God. It's like God is up in heaven and has this crystal ball, and he looks in the crystal ball into eternity past or eternity future, sees every person who would believe, and then predestines them. Well, that conveniently puts *you* at the center. God is responding to what *you're* doing.

See, to foreknow literally means to know beforehand or to know in advance. God knows Christians in a way that makes a difference. God knows *you* in a way that makes a difference if you're a Christian. Think about it. To know somebody in the Bible is very intimate. Adam knew Eve (that's intimate knowing), and she conceived and bore him a son.

Remember those scary words Jesus says? They come to him, saying, "Did we not cast out demons? Did we not…?" And he goes, "Depart from me; I never knew you." That doesn't mean he's talking to the angels, like, "Hey, who's Joe? I don't recognize him." No. He knows everybody. He's like, "I didn't know you in a saving and special way."

This will make more sense as we talk about the next word: *predestined*. Now, I know *predestination* for certain people is a scary word, but I just have to tell you I was predestined to talk about this, so I had to. I had a joke about predestination, but I figured you knew it was coming.

So, let's talk. Here's the interesting thing. Every Christian believes in predestination. You have to. It's in the Bible. If I'm a Bible person and I believe the words of Scripture, then every Christian has to believe in predestination. It's just how do you define it? Here's the interesting thing. I actually believe that every Christian, when they're on their knees praying, believes the same things about God.

If you've ever prayed and thanked God for your salvation, you believe in predestination. If you've ever gotten on your knees and prayed for someone to come to Christ and for God to wake them up, then you believe in predestination. *Predestination* just means God pre-decides. Think about it…*pre-destination*. God sets the destination beforehand.

Think about it this way. Say you go to the airport. You get to the airport and, unfortunately, you couldn't fly Delta, so you're flying American. Those of us who fly know the difference. So, unfortunately, you're not able to fly Delta; you have to fly American.

When you get to the counter, they give you the card (say you're going to London), and it says, "Final destination," and you know where you're headed. Here's what the airlines are saying: "We're going to get you there." Predestination.

Now, will you have to connect through Atlanta or Charlotte? Are you going to lose your luggage? Are you going to get delayed? Are you going to get a middle seat and the guy next to you is eating a tuna fish sandwich? Maybe. For some of you, that's your life. What God is saying is "Getting you home to your final destination, there will be a lot of turbulence, but I promise I'm going to get you there."

So, God says, "I knew you in eternity past, and in eternity past I predestined you." Then, this is where we get… He goes from past to present to future. Then he said, "I *called* you." Now, what does that mean? There are two types of calling in the Bible: *general calling* and *effectual calling*.

Anytime I'm up here preaching the gospel and telling you, "Repent and believe and trust Christ," or anytime you're sharing with a friend or meeting with your brother at Thanksgiving, and you've had the same conversation 14 times, and you don't know how to say it any other way, but late at night you say some version of "Man, I really wish you'd consider the claims of Christ and repent and trust in him…" That's what's called the *general call*. Humans make it and it can be rejected. It happens all the time.

The *effectual call* is what *this* is. This is the irresistible internal call when God speaks to a person's heart. I actually get a front-row seat of seeing this all the time, because I'll be up here preaching, and there are some people who are really being moved, and God is doing a great work in their life. Then I look over *there* and there's someone sleeping. I mean, maybe they took the red-eye last night, but that's the international sign for "I don't want to be here. I'm super bored."

What's interesting is… I've seen this my entire ministry. Two people show up at an event, a conference, a camp, or a church service. The exact same message goes out. One person goes, "I couldn't care less," and the other person says, "I want to give my entire life to this." We'll get into this in the weeks to come. What's the difference? Is the one person a better person and that's why they do that? Are they just more given to faith?

Guys, if you believe this, like the apostle Paul did, it actually makes you very bold and very brave in sharing the gospel, because you go, "I don't care how hardened a sinner this guy or gal is. God could speak to their heart." Which leads to being *justified*, which we've talked about a lot, so I won't give it a big thing. Once you're called you're justified. That just means God legally declares you not guilty but righteous because of what Christ has done.

Here's the thing. Your salvation is so secure God refers to it in the past tense, even things that haven't happened yet. If you're a Christian, the only one of the four things that hasn't happened… You were foreknown, predestined, called, and justified. There's no break in the chain. You *will* be glorified. In other words, here's what God is saying: "I am going to not only work everything together for your good; I always finish what I start."

Here's what this is about: you cannot lose your salvation. If you *could* lose your salvation, you *would*. If it was possible for you to lose your salvation, 100 percent you would, but it doesn't depend on you in the first place. What Paul is saying here is "Listen. God is going to bring you safely home through many trials, tribulations, and yes, death."

Most Christians aren't afraid of death, but they *are* afraid of dying and all of the suffering that goes along with it. Paul is saying, "Guys, you're going to be glorified." Here's what this means. This is the good that we're ultimately all headed toward. We will not just be freed from the penalty of sin; we will fully be freed from the power and the presence of sin. This is what Christians have called, for 2,000 years, *eternal security*.

So, here's how I want to end. I want to end with us, as we always do, singing and praying and responding to this text. For example, in just a few minutes, we're going to begin to sing together, and for some of you, there's an area of your life, if you could be honest (and it's totally fine to be honest), where you feel weak. That's okay, by the way.

Especially if you're young, you just need to realize everybody is a novice at everything they first try to do. We may have some new moms and dads in here who just go, "I feel weak." We just want to come down and pray for you. You know, you're new in your marriage. You're new at whatever it is. Maybe you feel weak in some struggle with sin. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. This is just a time to pray together.

I mean, one of the main teachings of this section is God is with us, God is for us, and God is praying with us. Since we've had the altars here at the Patterson Campus in Winston and at our other campuses, what's interesting is I still, almost every week, get emotional watching what happens down here. It's not just people coming forward; it's people coming forward and then other people coming forward to pray for them.

I remember one of the first weeks we did it, I saw some young man who was probably in his mid-20s. I recognized who he was, and he came down and prayed right over *here*. I knew him a little bit, and I was standing back, giving him a second to pray. I thought, "I wonder what he's going through."

I said, "I'm going to go pray for him." Just as I was about to do that, I saw his dad walk down. So, this young man is in our church, and his dad is in our church. They were sitting

in different places. His dad walks down right next to him and puts his arm around him and together they pray.

Guys, that's it. Jesus is praying for us in heaven, the Holy Spirit is praying inside of us, and we have people here today to pray with you and for you. So, whatever you're groaning about, wherever you feel weak, in your mind you're like, "God, I just want to pray that you would help me to believe that you're going to work *this* thing, along with everything else in my life, together for my good."

The ultimate story on suffering in the Old Testament is the story of Job. We read it, and we know why he's suffering, because we're able to see it. "Okay. He had this conversation. Satan asked that…" We can see the whole story. If you read the entire book of Job, Job never knows why he's suffering. He actually never, ever gets an answer. The one thing he gets (and it happens in the last four or five chapters) is a bigger view of God.

So, what Paul has been trying to do in all of chapter 8 is just give us a bigger view of God that's bigger than our suffering and better than our sin, so that as we head into the future (and who knows what's going to happen there) we have an incredible view of God, a God who foreknew us in eternity past and has promised to glorify us in the future. Let's pray.

Lord, across all of our campuses, I just pray that we would respond. Where we would feel weak, it says, "Come." Lord, I think about the apostle Paul. Somebody needs to get down here, and they have their own thorn in the flesh. Paul said there were three different times (and I think that means three different seasons of his life) where he asked you to remove it, Lord, and then you said to him, "My grace is sufficient, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Lord, would you create a church that has a big view of God? Would you create a church that understands the Holy Spirit is praying? Would you create a church that can even realize (maybe someone needs to hear this) that you can even take our own sin, which you do not approve of and do not condone, but you can even take the most sinful, stupid, foolish things we've done, and you can also make that part of the "all things" that work together for our good. Would you do it for your glory and our good? We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.