

Encouragement

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Good morning Friend,

The Apostle Paul often writes about tough times, as do many other biblical authors. One of Paul's richest paragraphs about tough times is found in Romans 8:28-39. It begins with a familiar verse, 8:28 . . . *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.* A familiar verse, yes . . . but an appreciated verse, often no.

Let's take another look at the text. Firstly, a word of caution. Let's never use this verse flippantly nor carelessly when we are talking with someone who is going through a tough time. I want to personally claim this verse as I, MYSELF, am going through a tough time. But I want to be sensitive to SOMEONE ELSE who is broken-hearted with their heaviness. This text is not meant to bat a weary pilgrim, which further hurts them rather than helps them.

Secondly, there are many Christians who truly dislike this verse . . . and who say, "I don't like this verse. It just doesn't work for me." I've discovered some reasons why it is easy to fall into a distrust of 8:28 . . .

- **OUR FINITENESS.** In our limited knowledge, we just don't understand the value and the purpose of tough times.
- **OUR SHALLOWNESS.** If our world is 'me-centered,' I am troubled by the verse.
- **OUR PREMATURE EVALUATION.** Often, too quickly, we dismiss the verse as un-workable. The verse doesn't promise an immediate answer. Rather, we must exercise trust as we believe that eventually God will bring about a *good* conclusion . . . in His own way and in His time.
- **OUR EQUATING MEANNESS WITH TOUGH TIMES.** I've heard some Christians, when walking through tough times, say . . . "My God would never bring tough times into my life." Sadly, such a person doesn't know the God of the Bible. The biblical authors frequently and clearly state that God does orchestrate tough times into our lives. These authors know and teach that God is indeed the Source of many tough times: Job, David, Peter, Paul, and others. God is not a mean God. He doesn't bring tough times to us to destroy us but rather to bless us and to make us more like Him. The Psalmist states . . . *It was good for me to be afflicted* (Psalm 119:71).

Later this month, I will celebrate the 13th anniversary of my near-fatal automobile accident. At the time of the accident, I was given less than a two percent chance of survival. It was tough for me, for my wife, for my children and grandchildren, and for my ministry with Barnabas International. It looked cruel. But since then, Evie and I have come to understand that it wasn't one of the worst things that could have happened . . . in fact it was a gift from God. Good has come . . . and it will continue to grow out of the ugliness of the accident.

Joni Eareckson Tada has also spoken of her swimming accident at Chesapeake Bay as a gift from the Lord. She counts it as the second greatest gift ever given by God to her.

Gerald Sittser, in his excellent book, *A GRACE DISGUISED*, writes about the horrible accident that took the life of his mother, his wife, and his daughter. He, too, came to Romans 8 and focused on verse 32, which says . . . *God did not spare His own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things.* Gerald eventually came to the same conclusion. Indeed tough times can become blessed times.

My prayer for you is this . . .

That you will learn to love this text, Romans 8:28. Yes, to love it . . . and to believe it . . . and to live it.

Be encouraged,

Lareau Lindquist

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