

**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**

...In the life of Joseph:

Joseph said to his brothers, who betrayed and sold him into slavery, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but *God meant it for good*, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Genesis 50:20, ESV). Genesis 50:20 is the Romans 8:28 of the Old Testament. Knowing exactly what Joseph’s brothers would do, God *intended* to use it for good. He did so as part of his eternal plan. For his children have “been predestined according to the purpose of him who works *all things* according to the counsel of his will” (Ephesians 1:11).

“So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt...You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good... (Genesis 45:4–8; 50:20). We see two wills at work here. The brothers successfully did evil, *and* God successfully brought about good from their evil. But God’s good dramatically eclipsed their evil. He sovereignly worked so that the moral evil they committed, and the evils that came from it, accomplished in breathtaking (but not immediately evident) ways his ultimately good purposes.

Nothing about God’s sovereign work in Joseph’s life suggests that God works any differently in the lives of his other children. In fact, Romans 8:28 and Ephesians 1:11 make it emphatically clear that he works the same way with us. Countless millions of choices and actions are contemplated every second across this globe. Our all-knowing and all-powerful God chooses *exactly* which ones he will cause or not, ordain or not, permit or not. He does not permit evils arbitrarily, but with purpose. Everything he permits matches up with his wisdom and ultimately serves his holiness, justice, love and grace. As Joni Eareckson Tada puts it, “God permits what he hates to achieve what he loves.”

...in the death of Jesus:

The Cross is God’s answer to the question, “Why don’t you do something about evil?” God *did* do something...and what he did was so great that it ripped in half, from top down, the fabric of the universe itself.

What is good about Good Friday? Why isn’t it called *Bad* Friday? Because *we see that day in retrospect*. Out of the appallingly bad came what was inexpressibly good. The good trumps the bad, because though the bad was temporary, the good is eternal. In the movie *The Passion of the Christ*, Jesus, overwhelmed with pain and exhaustion, lies on the ground as guards kick, mock, and spit on him. A horrified woman, her hand outstretched, pleads, “Someone, stop this!” The great irony is that “Someone,” God’s Son, was doing something unspeakably great that required it *not* be stopped. Had someone delivered Jesus from his suffering that day, he could not have delivered us from ours.

God does not merely empathize with our sufferings. He actually suffers. Jesus is God. What Jesus suffered, God suffered. God ordained and allowed all this—Jesus’ temporary suffering—so he could prevent our eternal suffering.

The Bible makes promises we don’t want God to keep. For instance, “It has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him” (Philippians 1:29). “In the world you will have tribulation,” Jesus pledged (John 16:33, ESV). “Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12, NLT). They may not be our favorites, but we should trust these promises as surely as we trust John 3:16.

The first story of the post-Fall world is Cain’s murder of Abel, a righteous man who pleased God and suffered as a direct result. Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and nearly all the prophets weren’t just righteous people who happened to suffer. Rather, they suffered *because* they were righteous. As a result of following Christ, believers routinely suffer. But never outside of God’s purposes of sovereign grace.

...in our stories:

You and I are characters in God's story. Every character serves a purpose. God loves a great story, and conflict, change and redemptive purposes are central to such stories. All of us who know him will recall and celebrate and continue to live in that story for all eternity. I empathize with characters in the novels I write since I too am a character in God's story. At times I'd love to take a break from the drama. Three months off without stress would feel nice. But I realize I'm part of something great, far bigger than myself. And I trust God to bring the whole story together beautifully.

Given the option while facing his trials, I'm confident Joseph would have walked off the stage of God's story. After being sold into slavery and later being falsely accused and sent to prison, Joseph had surely endured enough for one life, and at times must have felt like giving up! Talk to Job in the middle of his story—with ten children dead and excruciating boils covering his body, God apparently abandoning him and friends haranguing him. Ask if he wants out. I know what he'd say because he said it: "Why did I not perish at birth?" (Job 3:11).

But that's all over now. On the New Earth, sit by Job and Joseph at a lavish banquet with their Lord. Ask them, "Be honest. *Was it really worth it?*"

"Absolutely," Job says. Joseph nods emphatically. "But, Job, Joseph...had God given you the choice, wouldn't you have walked out of the story?" Joseph replies, Job agreeing, "Of course. In a heartbeat. I'm just glad he didn't let me!"

Satan intends your suffering for evil; God intends it for good. Satan attempts to destroy your faith, while God invites you to draw upon his sovereign grace to sustain you. Whose purpose in your suffering will prevail? If we truly recognize God's sovereignty even over Satan's work—not just by saying the words, but by believing the truth—it doesn't merely alter our perspective; it transforms it.

In 2 Corinthians 12:7, we see Satan had one purpose for Paul's suffering, and God had another. Paul recognized that God used the thorn in his flesh he calls "a messenger of Satan" to conform his character to Christ's (2 Corinthians 12:8). If God can utilize for good "a messenger of Satan," then surely a car accident, a stolen iPod, a fight with your friend or your employer's unreasonable expectations can be tools in God's hand as well.



Before my mother would bake a cake, she'd lay the ingredients on the kitchen counter. One day I decided to experiment. I tasted the individual ingredients of a chocolate cake. Baking powder. Baking soda. Raw eggs. Vanilla extract. I discovered that *almost everything that goes into a cake tastes terrible by itself*. But a remarkable metamorphosis took place when my mother, far more knowledgeable and wise and skilled than I, mixed the ingredients in just the right amounts and baked them together at just the right temperature. The cake tasted delicious. I learned to have faith in her amazing powers!

In a similar way, the individual ingredients of trials and apparent tragedies taste bitter to us. There is an all-inclusiveness in the "all things" of Romans 8:28. No translation says "each thing by itself is good," but "all things work together *for* good," and not on their own, but under God's sovereign hand. Romans 8:28 doesn't tell me I should say, "It is good," if my leg breaks, my house burns down, I am robbed and beaten, or my child dies. But no matter how bitter the taste of the individual components, God can carefully measure out and mix all ingredients together and regulate the temperature in order to produce something wonderful—Christlikeness—for his glory and our good.

List the worst things that have ever happened to you. Now list the best things. The longer you've lived, the more you'll see an overlap between the two lists. God has used some of the worst things to accomplish some of the best. By faith let's trust him today that in eternity we'll look back and see, in retrospect, how Romans 8:28 was absolutely true!