

Natalie W. Bell
July 26, 2026

Life is Hard....But God is Good
Romans 8:28-39

⁸ We know that ***all things work together for good***^[u] for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. 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 within a large family.^[v] ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

³¹ What then are we to say about these things? ***If God is for us, who is against us?*** ³² He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³ Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.^[w] ³⁵ ***Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*** ³⁶ As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all day long;
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ ***No, in all these things we are more than conquerors*** through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that ***neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,*** ³⁹ ***nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

These are some of the most beautiful words in scripture.

Nothing CAN separate us from God's love.

They are also some of the most misquoted

and misinterpreted verses in the Bible—especially Romans 8:28:

*We know that ***all things work together for good***^[u] for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose*

Christians sometimes use Romans 8:28 to say that

Everything happens for a reason....

which is NOT exactly what it says,
 And when we say or believe that we are logically saying
 That God causes everything to happen.

The good, the bad, and the evil.

But that is NOT the God we believe in, not the Savior we follow, is it?

All kinds of bad things do happen in this world,
 Much of it, because of us.
 Because it is a broken, fallen creation.
 And human actions have consequences,
 Our world is a mess.

Paul himself says in Romans 8:19-23:

²² *We know that the **whole creation has been groaning together as it suffers together the pains of labor**, ²³ and not only the creation, but we ourselves, ... groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.*

In other words, it's a mess—

but we believe that Jesus will come and set it right.

We are a mess, but God is with us,
 and one day we too will be redeemed, healed,
 and set completely free from sin and brokenness.
 This is the foundation of our Gospel.

But many people, many Christians, want a formula for life,

An ***easy way to understand what's happening*** in the world.

So we say things like “*Everything happens for a reason*”,
 AKA “it must have been God’s will”.

But fatal car accidents and natural disasters are NOT God’s will,

God is all loving, all healing.
 God desires redemption and wholeness,
 not brokenness and suffering.

So how do we solve the problem of evil and pain,

Without saying that God did it all?

Well, the short answer is, we don’t, this side of heaven.

We might really have to stand in the **heavenly FAQ line**—
and ask Jesus, face to face.

***Because each and every one of us has or will
experience unexplainable suffering.***

The kind that makes you say---**Why, God?**

Why are you allowing this to happen?

The kind that makes you cringe,

when a well meaning Christian friend or family member says

‘it must have been God’s will’,

Or ‘I guess God needed another angel’,

Or ‘it’s all for the best’.

To which, you have my pastoral permission,

To say (perhaps only in your mind)—bologna.

Phooey.

I cannot believe that.

***Because our good and gracious God is NOT in the business
of zapping people!***

What we know about our loving God is **just that**—God is loving.

God is good, all the time.

And all the time, God is good.

And, God is ALWAYS with us—no matter what.

In other words, when we suffer, God cries with us.

Isaiah says **God walks with us through the waters and fires of life....**

And I can think of a lot of waters and fires right now,

In our world, our nation, and of course our own lives.

So what on earth IS Paul saying in Romans 8?

If he is NOT saying that everything is good,

Or everything is caused by God....what?

I believe Paul IS saying that God can USE everything for Good,

Even those things that are breaking our hearts and lives.

There's a big difference in **God causing it, and using it.**
 A difference in God making it happen,
 and God weaving it together for good in the end.

One of my favorite books is by Professor Kate Bowler of Duke University.
 It's called: ***Everything Happens for a Reason, and Other Lies I've Loved.***
 It's all about her journey with stage 4 colon cancer,
 And dealing with the belief,
 and the assumptions of other Christians,
 that everything DOES happen for a reason.

Which is actually NOT very Biblical.

God can USE everything for good....

Which is different than everything happens for a reason...

It's kind of like people saying that

God doesn't give us more than we can handle....every heard that?

Also, not very Biblical.

The verses people are generally using are 1 Corinthians 10:13:

Which ACTUALLY says:

*¹³No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and **he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength,** but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.*

In other words, God will not let you be tempted
 beyond your ability,
 and God provides a way of escape.

It's about temptation to sin, NOT all of life's burdens!

Life IS hard, and full of countless burdens.

And here in Romans, Paul acknowledges that, when he asks:

What are we to say about these things,
if God is for us, who is against us?

*Paul continues: **Who will separate us from the love of Christ?***

Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine,

or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

Wow---think about that list...

It's all of ***our deepest fears, right?***

Many of us, and many people in our world,

ARE in hardship and distress!

Many ARE **persecuted** for standing up for truth, and those without a voice!

Many ARE in danger of **hunger or nakedness** because of job loss, or financial challenges in our economy today!

Many ARE in **peril**, there's a war going on, and countless other examples of pain and suffering!

What are YOU facing right now?

Maybe it's disease, grief, broken relationships, addiction....

maybe it's a lack of financial security or a lack of hope in the future.

We know that all things are NOT all good.

There's plenty of evil and sin to go around.

This is a broken world.

We are ALL facing hardships.

But, what if God can work IN all of that?

What if God can bring some light in the darkness we face?

What if that's what Romans 8:28 really means?

That all things can work together for good, against the odds.....

If you read the New Testament, especially the Book of Acts, you can't miss Paul's extreme suffering.

He was beaten, imprisoned, shipwrecked, shunned, run out of town, persecuted...

He even had a disability that he begged God to take from him.

A 'thorn in the flesh' he called it.

So Paul KNOWS that Life is Hard.

But He also knows that ***God is Good.***

What if WE believed that too? Deep down in our hearts?

No matter what we face?

That ***Life is hard--- but God is good.***

Have you ever seen a ***large TAPESTRY or MURAL?***

When you stand really close you see the individual ***threads***,
or the ***brushstrokes***, right?

But standing so close, you can't tell what is being depicted.

But if you step back, you can see the whole picture—

the beauty and all its impact.

All those little threads, or tiny brushstrokes,

they are ***pieces of the whole beautiful picture.***

Without them, there is no larger picture, no art, no beauty.

What if THAT'S the message behind Romans 8?

That God is weaving, painting our lives----for the GOOD?

There's a beautiful meditation in one of my favorite devotionals,
Streams in the Desert on July 23rd.

It says: *each of us has **many black dots or spots** in our life,*
and we can't understand why they are there, or why God permitted them.....

but when we allow God to draw some lines, and add some rests,
making those notes, we see a **'glorious harmony'**.

In other words, the black spots CAN be used,

To become the MUSIC of our lives!

Life IS Hard---but God is good.

The hardship of life is **not the WHOLE** story---

and it's certainly **not the END** of the story!

For us, or for all of creation!

Life is Hard—but we are more than conquerors over all that hardship,
THROUGH him who loved us.

We can literally overcome anything---with God's help.

Just as Paul says in **Philippians 4:13—**

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

What would it mean for you to believe that?

To live that?

***The truth is, God helps us, by giving His own life for us, in Jesus Christ.
The greatest gift of love and grace.***

God is the **AUTHOR** of all that is good,
and God desires good for each and every one of us!

Life is Hard ---

But that's NOT the Whole Story.

It's like a story from the life of author Jerry Sittser,
Who wrote **A Grace Revealed**.

He and three of his children survived a drunk driving car crash in 1991.
That driver jumped the median and hit them head on,
killing his mom, wife, and 4 year old daughter.

Over the years he has written profound reflections about loss, and suffering.
In his book, he shares the following story:

My son David is quiet and reflective. After the accident, he was the least likely to talk about it; but when he chose to, he usually had something significant to say or ask. ... "Do you think Mom sees us right now?" he suddenly asked.

I paused to ponder. "I don't know, David.

I think maybe she does see us. Why do you ask?"

"I don't see how she could, Dad. I thought Heaven was full of happiness. How could she bear to see us so sad?"

Could Lynda witness our pain in Heaven? How could that be possible? How could she bear it?

*"I think she does see us," I finally said. "But she sees the **whole story**, including how it all turns out, which is beautiful. It's going to be a good story, David."*

Sittser goes on to write: *I would not hazard to estimate the number of times I have been asked, "How does Christianity address the **problem of suffering**?" The Christian answer to suffering [is] Christ's suffering [and] Christ's resurrection **God knows** pain within himself; God knows joy within himself.*

*God knows the **whole story** as one, including how it **all turns out, which is glorious**.*

Jerry Sittser, A Grace Revealed (Zondervan, 2012), pp. 138-139

There is good in this broken, painful world!

God IS at work all around us—even now.

If we have the eyes to find it, and hearts to receive it.

God is always doing amazing things, no matter what's happening.

And God can ***bring good even out of the worst*** life brings.

Life is Hard—but that's NOT the whole story—because we believe that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Life is Hard—But God is Good,

And that is our ***Good News*** of the Gospel!

For this amazing grace, all God's people can say together, Amen.