

For the Good

By Mary Kane

Trials...hardships...adversities... We have all been through hard times. what do you think of when you hear these words? Please write a brief definition for *trials* in the space below:

Probably most of us wrote things like *suffering, unbearable circumstances, pain, grief, misery*. The Bible however has a very different definition for *trials*. Please consider the following information from Blue Letter Bible (BLB) concerning the word *trials*: "...an experiment, attempt, proving; adversity, affliction, trouble: sent by God and serving to test or prove one's character, faith, holiness." While trials can be hard and painful, God does not allow them in our lives to harm, wound or destroy us—quite the opposite. According to BLB, trials are sent to build character, faith and holiness. Did Blue Letter Bible define *trials* correctly or did they make a grievous error? Let's check into the final authority on truth about trials—the Bible.

Before we begin today's study please take a moment to confess any sin to your Father. Now ask Him to fill you afresh with His Holy Spirit that you may receive from the truth of His holy Word.

Please read our text for today, Romans 8:28-32.

According to verse 28, what must all things do?

By God's decree, all things must work together for our good. The Greek word for *work together* in this verse is *synergeo* which means "to partner in labor, to work together, to put forth power to work together." This word is derived from another Greek word *synergos* which means "a companion in work, a fellow worker, one who labors with another to further the cause of Christ. In the book of Job, we learn that Satan was allowed to initiate a

campaign of suffering against Job. However, at the end of this terrible season of suffering, Job is more fruitful than before. How frustrated Satan must be to learn that the very things he sends to discourage and destroy us labor and work to further the cause of Christ in our life!

Please go back and read verse 28 again.

The word used for *good* in this verse, *agathos*, means good, advantageous, profitable and excellent. It also refers to fruitfulness, fruitful soil, good soil, a fruitful tree, ready to bear fruit. Please realize that when we are following Christ every situation we encounter, the good, the bad, the ugly, is meant to produce fruit in our life.

To whom is the promise of verse 28 given?

The promise is given to those who love Him and who are called according to *His* purpose. The type of *love* referred to in this passage of scripture is very different from the word *love* we throw around so carelessly in the English. The word we use to speak of love for our cat, favorite blue-jeans or computer is the same word we use to speak of our love for our spouses, children or parents. In Romans 8:28 the word for love is *agapeo* which is a very special type of love. *Agapeo* is the kind of love that sent Jesus to the cross, it's the kind of love that is willing to do the best for another no matter what the cost. *Agapeo* is defined as "to take pleasure in a thing, to prize it above all other things, to be unwilling to abandon something or to do without it, to cleave to."ⁱ

Everyone is *called* by God to receive His grace for our sin by accepting Jesus death on the cross and to live our lives according to His plan. But will everyone answer His call? Many people will reject His call and live for themselves. Some people will accept both of these calls at one time. Others will accept both calls separately. I first accepted Christ as my Savior in the summer of 1983, but it wasn't until many years later that I gave up my plans for my life and I decided to live according to His purpose.

The word *called* used in verse 28 transliterates as *kletos* which means an invitation, invited by God to obtain salvation, to be called to some office, to be divinely selected and appointed by God.

How does it feel to know that *you* have been divinely selected by God to follow Him?

Let me sum this up:

God has personally invited you to accept His gift of salvation because He has laid aside very specific work for you to do for His kingdom. He has a calling on your life that only you can fulfill. You have the choice of accepting or rejecting His call. His calling will fill your life with purpose and satisfaction that you will not find from any other job, career or hobby. Every person on this earth has been designed to live a life of purpose and effectiveness. Perhaps you think that God would never use a person like you because of your past/ your present/your flaw. Please know that the God who calls you is perfectly able to redeem and restore any life, any situation any sin. If you reach your senior years your calling does not end when you retire; your work is not over just different. When it is all said and done, I want my life to count for eternity, don't you? It is only through answering God's call on your life that you will accomplish anything of lasting eternal value.

What has God called you to do in this lifetime?

If you are of retirement age, what new ministry is God bringing at this stage of your life?

How are you living out this calling? In other words what are you doing to fulfill your calling?

If you aren't sure what your calling is, please take a moment and ask God to show you about your calling. I have just prayed and asked that over the next few days or weeks that God would plant in your heart a yearning for the work that He has prepared for you to do. Spend extra time in prayer and in His Word, seeking His Presence. And as you seek His presence He will reveal His will for your life to you. Be looking for His answer.

Now let's turn our attention to another concept from verse 28. Please fill in the missing word in the verse below:

"And we know that all things work for good to those who are the called according to His _____."

I discovered something amazing as I was researching the word *purpose*. The original Greek word used for *purpose* in this passage is *prothesis*. I traced this word back to its original meaning and was surprised to learn that *prothesis* means "the setting forth of a thing, placing it in view, the *shewbread*. The shewbread was twelve loaves of bread that was placed each week in the temple before the presence of the Lord. "The loaves symbolized the fact that on the basis of the sacrificial atonement of the Cross, believers are accepted before God, and nourished by Him in the Person of Christ. The showbread was partaken of by the priests, as representatives of the nation. Priesthood now being co-extensive with all who belong to Christ, 1Pe 2:5, 9, He, the Living Bread, is the nourishment of all, and where He is, there, representatively, they are." I was puzzled for a moment as to why the word *purpose* would be the same exact word as *shewbread* and then it hit me: God's perfect purpose for our lives is like bread to us. In other words, when we live out His purpose for our lives we will be greatly satisfied and nourished. God's calling on our lives is the only thing that will satisfy us. The work He gives us will be our very bread—the thing that satisfy us and gives us a reason to get up every day. His calling on our lives will nourish, develop and fulfill us all the days of our lives. Like bread satisfies the body, His purpose satisfies the soul.

Part of His purpose for our lives will be facing some very hard things that will work for our good.

What hard things have you faced lately?

Have you seen any good fruit from the situation/s that you listed above?

The hard things we are enduring are working to accomplish very specific objectives in our lives. According to verse 29 the hard things have the express privilege of conforming us to the image of Christ. The things that we strive to avoid are the very things that will make us more like our Savior. It is not the easy times that grow us. As a teacher I often tell my students, "Easy is boring!" It is. There is no sense of accomplishment in "easy." It is the hard seasons that "grow us" and cause us to sink our roots deeply into the soil of Christ's love. May I even go so far to say that it is by persevering through the hardships and trials that we will fulfill our calling and bring God great glory. There is nothing that He will withhold from us, good things, hard things, challenging things, hurtful things, beautiful things, if they will bring us good. If we are in Christ all things are "good things" for us. Every person we encounter today; every compliment, comment, insult, sting, blessing; every act of kindness, harshness, charity, or love will work for our good. With Christ every pain has a purpose.

Please read verse 29 again.

Was God surprised by any of the hard things that came to you?

May I say very carefully and gently that none of these things have taken God unaware. He knew the trials were coming and made a plan to use them for your good; to conform you to the image of His Son. If He has allowed something hard and painful to come to you it is for a very crucial reason. Will you trust Him through the pain?

What then shall we say to these hard, painful things that hurt and deeply wound us? Verse 31 gives us the answer.

Please write verse 31 in the space below.

I believe deeply in the power of the spoken Word of God. Right now please speak the second half of verse 31 out loud to the circumstances that have wounded and continue to hurt you.

If you are in Christ, nothing can defeat you! Broken marriages, prodigal children, cancer, addictions, the death of a spouse or a beloved child, aging parents, sickness, disease, abuse...God will use every one of these things for your good not your destruction.

Now, let's look at the lives of a few people from the Bible who experienced extreme circumstances that God used for their good and His glory.

As a parent, I think that Abraham went through one of the toughest trials. Please read Genesis 22:1-18.

Please record the circumstance Abraham was called to endure:

Abraham was asked by God to gather his son, wood and fire and offer his only son as a sacrifice to God. Through this set of strange circumstances

God illustrated to Abraham the truths of the Gospel; a father offering his one and only son as a sacrifice for sin. Think of this event as a prophetic object lesson that Abraham would never forget.

What blessings did Abraham receive as a result of persevering through this hard test (verse 17)?

Did you notice that Abraham was not the only one blessed by his obedience?

Who else was blessed (verse 18)?

All the nations of the earth. That is a big blessing.

Now please read a part of the story of Joseph, a young Hebrew boy sold into slavery by his brothers, in Genesis 45:4-11 and 50:15-21.

Please list some of the blessings and who benefitted by them because of the captivity of Joseph (verses 45:10-11 and 50:20):

Please write the heart of Genesis 50:20 in the space provided.

Anything that is meant for our evil, to destroy us or harm us, God means for our good. He has the final say in everything.

Let's turn to the New Testament to consider another account of evil transformed into good. Please read John 8:2-12.

What was the final outcome of this account?

The evil intentions of the crowd (to take the life of a woman in order to trap Jesus) and the evil intentions of the woman (adultery) were turned to good by our Savior. What should have been the adulterous woman's last day on earth was the first day of the rest of her life. God is amazing.

Please let me pray for you now.

Dearest Holy Father,

I pray for my brothers and sisters in Christ who are struggling with something terribly painful. It seems as if they can't possibly come out of this situation whole, let alone endure it for one more day. I pray that at this moment they would feel Your great peace and calm assurance. Please help them to draw closer to you through this trial. I thank you Father that you will use this injury, accident, job loss, broken relationship, debt, wayward child, mistake or season of sin to bring great good in their lives. Please help them repent if needed and ask You to work great redemption, restoration and salvation into this situation. Father, Your Word promises that You will work all things for the good of those who love You and have been called according to Your purpose. I call upon that promise. "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; But we will remember the name of the Lord our God" (Psalm 20:7).

In Jesus Holy Name,

Amen

Please name one thing you can do today to show God that you trust Him to use a past or present trial for your good:

In closing, please read one final verse.

O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these is the life of my spirit.

Oh restore me to health and make me live!

Behold, it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness;

but in love you have delivered my life from the pit of destruction,

for you have cast all my sins behind your back.

Isaiah 38:16-17

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ⁱ Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for *agapaō* (Strong's 25)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2011. 20 Nov 2011. < <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G25&t=KJV> >