

Evergreen Presbyterian Church

Pastor Adam Parker

May 24th, 2026

Sermon Title: All Things, Part 2: What Do “All Things” Do?

Sermon Text: Romans 8:28

Rom. 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Main Point: God orders the circumstances in which his people live such that all things cooperate in bringing about the good purposes of delivering his people and creation from the effects of sin.

Outline:

1. God’s Goal: Our Good
2. God’s Means: Gifts and Groaning

Introduction

Last week, we spent all our time dwelling on what the Bible teaches about God’s sovereign control over all the world and all our lives. And I showed you from Scripture that God in his word claims for himself the power of absolute control over nature, over the actions of people, and over events in our lives – be they health events, financial events, or even events that just appear to us to be chance. And the point of all of this was, that this is a two-part verse: it claims that all things work together for good for those who are believers in Jesus Christ.

And I also want you to notice, last week specifically I made the decision not to quote any theologians or philosophers in my sermon (except for a quick reference to something R.C. Sproul once said at the end of the message). I didn’t quote John

Calvin. I didn't quote Augustine. I didn't even quote my good friend Peter Martyr. And I intentionally kept them away last week because I didn't want to give the mistaken impression that we only believe these things because brilliant minds before us taught them.

Instead, the whole sermon was just letting the text speak. And I did that because I want you to be convinced that God *himself* tells us these things. "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases" (Ps. 115:3). Or when the book of Daniel tells us: "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, 'What have you done?'" (Dan. 4:35). I want you to hear *God* saying this.

But last week also left us with a bit of a cliffhanger. Because we were sort of left with a "so what" moment. So God is sovereign over everything. So God is in control of anything that comes my way. How does that serve Paul's larger project of encouraging us and telling us how amazing the gospel is if things are still going so badly in my life? If my life is a country music song... then why should it matter anything at all to me to have someone say, "You know, all things work together for good"?

And the answer of Paul in today's passage is, "Because God is good... because God loves his people... because God is absolutely powerful over everything that comes our way... we can be sure that everything we experience will be used by God to mature us, to make us more holy, and to bring glory to his own name."

Everything is used. Nothing is wasted. Why? Because our God is sovereign.

So the outline today is very straightforward: first what is God's goal in our lives? It is "our good." You may wonder, what does that mean? We'll look at that. And then second is God's means: How does he make his goal a reality? He uses our gifts *and* groaning to make that happen.

My hope today is twofold. First, I want to reorient our expectations of what a faithful Christian life actually looks like in practice. And second, I want to ensure that when disaster does strike, every one of us has a deep, unshakable foundation to stand on.

1. God's Goal: Our Good

So, let's look at our first point: What is God's goal in our lives? Paul's answer is, "our good."

I think on the face of it, this might be one of the most easily misunderstood verses in all of the Bible. Because it's pretty easy to read today's verse, and at a glance think that if I'm a Christian, then Paul is saying my life is going to be pretty good—go pretty smoothly. Right? It says "all things work together!"

And that also means that if someone believes that—that Christian equals life is good and smooth—then they will also be tempted to think that it also means that if they are really Christians then they won't suffer. "All things work together for good." The problem is, when they do, then, suffer, it's easy to think that either this promise has failed or maybe I'm just not a real Christian. Either God can't keep this promise to cause all things to work together for our good, or maybe my suffering means I'm not really called according to his purpose. So we make our suffering the test of whether or not we're actual Christians. And if the book of Job teaches us anything, it is that our suffering is not a measure of our standing with God. He doesn't promise to give faithful people an easy life, nor does he promise that unfaithful people will always have a hard life. Job teaches the opposite. So does Habakkuk.

The reality runs deeper. Paul is saying that saints suffer too. But even the hardships and events which cause groaning for saints are a part of God's larger purpose. How do we know this? Well we don't have to go far. Stay in this same text and just go to the next verse in our reading. In verse 29 Paul tells us what all of this is for. What is the goal? What (in other words) is the "good" that all things work together for? Verse 29 says, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined..." [Now, we'll look at both of those ideas in two weeks, but] foreknew and predestined to what? The answer: "to be conformed to the image of his Son."

If you ask the question of what it is that God is aiming for in your life, the answer from God is not ease. Ease isn't his goal for you. Instead, his goal is, "he's shaping us to look more like Jesus."

Maybe you think, “okay, but how often does God really talk this way about his goal for us?” Well let’s go a little further here to Hebrews 12:10. There, the author says this:

“[Our earthly fathers] disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but [God] disciplines us for our good, so that we may share in his holiness.”

So the author is saying, “God deals with us like a Father is meant to: by disciplining us for our good.” And what is God’s “good” that he has for us? “that we may share in his holiness.”

Here is a big problem with why people misunderstand Romans 8:28: they read their own idea of what they think would be “good” onto this passage. So they think it’s saying, “All things are smooth, and comfortable, and pleasant for those who are called.” So even if they realize this passage isn’t promising that all things work out in everyone’s life... they can still get it wrong by thinking, “God wants me comfortable.”

No, discipline is not comfortable. It is not pleasant. But God does it for our good because he loves us too much to give us comfort. He has something better than comfort in mind: and that “something” is holiness. Christlikeness.

So for believers in Christ, we have a very clear task: God is calling us to align our own hearts with God’s heart. We are called cultivate a greater desire for holiness than we have for comfort. Now, I know that “holiness” can sometimes sound like a cold or abstract concept. But this is not really a desire for the *idea* of holiness. It is a desire to be conformed to the one you’re already united to by faith. We are united to the Son, and as his people, the cry of our heart, at rock bottom should be to look like the one we love.

2. God’s Means: Gifts and Groaning

The second point for today is God’s means: Gifts and Groaning.

So think about this: if Paul says God causes all things to work together in our life to increase holiness and make us more like Jesus, what does that look like in

practice? What are the means [the tools] that God uses to shape us into disciples that resemble Jesus?

Well, to put it broadly, it means that God uses all kinds of things, which we could categorize as gifts and groaning. He uses both pain and pleasure. He uses things that are immediately and obviously pleasant, and things that, in the moment, are not pleasant at all.

Not all Christians have the exact same experience. For some of us, God's means involve an easier path filled with more obvious gifts. But for many of us, this means being brought to our knees in deep dependence through groaning and sorrow.

This is exactly why the saints in Scripture could rejoice when they suffered. In Acts 5:41, the apostles left the presence of the council "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name." That kind of rejoicing only makes sense when a follower of Christ places a higher premium on holiness than on comfort.

We also need to make a crucial distinction here: it is not our sufferings, on their own, that work together for our good. It is God's active work of redemption *through* those experiences. This is not just some sentimental proverb that applies to everyone in the world. These promises are specifically for those who—as we will see in the coming weeks—have been predestined, called, justified, and glorified. For God's *enemies* (for example), "all things" do not work together for their good, but rather for their judgment. Many people experience God "giving them up" to their sin, which is the exact opposite of their good.

But for the believer, everything changes. Think of the Psalmist in Psalm 119:71: "It was good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes." What is the goal of the Psalmist? Not the affliction itself. The affliction is the *means* of getting to the good that God has for the Psalmist. And the good was "that I might learn your statutes." He's not just chasing an intellectual knowledge; it goes beyond what we know in our minds down to what we believe about God from the heart. He wanted to learn God's statutes more than he wanted to be comfortable! That is real maturity.

Or think of James 1:2-4:

“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

Notice what James does here. He doesn't just say, “You suffer now, but something good is coming later.” He's saying, “Right *now*, count it all joy.” How can we possibly count it joy even while we suffer? Because knowing what God is doing changes how we see the pain while it's happening. Right now, you can celebrate even as you weep. Right now, God is using the crucible to shape you into someone who is perfect and complete. Gold isn't refined without heat, and a statue isn't formed without being struck by a hammer.

Christian, would you ask God to help you to learn the discipline of looking for the hand of God... seeing the ways he might be making us more holy through our everyday life circumstances. The possibilities of what God is doing in his people are many and varied. When you face frustrating delays in traffic, he may be developing patience in you. When you face sickness, he may be developing a sense of dependency and helplessness in you, or a deep love for others who suffer. When you go through financial struggles, he may be reminding you of your powerlessness and driving you to prayerful living. All of those things are spirit wrought works, but they come about through the experience of suffering. They don't happen when things are smooth and easy.

Christian suffering is strange because we suffer from a position of vulnerable security. We feel incredibly frail, and we're tempted to doubt God's promises in the dark. But we only *feel* vulnerable. In reality, our suffering is completely different from the world's suffering because we are entirely secure. James is saying, “Let God's promises cover your suffering now.”

As your pastor, I want you to be willing to tell me the truth about how you are doing. If your faith is shaky, if you're anxious or terrified, it is okay for you to tell me that. What I'm about to say is not meant to shame you if you feel scared. But I have to say, I find it incredibly encouraging when I speak with someone in a season of suffering who can tell me from the heart, “The Lord is good, and I trust him.”

That is not a cliché. It's maturity. If you mean those words, then God has persuaded you all the way to the level of your heart that he loves you too much to let you emerge from a trial with a sad, empty faith.

And often, God has an even bigger purpose at work: he uses our experiences to minister to others. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 that God

“comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

I know a large number of you could testify that this is true. Many of the hardest things I've suffered in life were later used by God to help me minister to others. In the past few months, we have had several people in our church receive cancer diagnoses. Do you know what I saw in the midst of that? I saw others who had walked through that exact same diagnosis in the past stepping up, speaking the truth, and offering comfort, because they knew what it was like.

But I do want to offer a word of pastoral caution here: do not glibly use Romans 8:28, or deploy it too freely. First of all, this is not a promise for unbelievers. Someone who does not trust in Christ will take this as a promise that their life will be good. And so we do not want to contribute to that misunderstanding.

But there's a second caution I want to make about not being too uncritical in how you deploy this verse: many times people are suffering deeply, and they are not always ready to hear just how clearly *you* can see the hand of God in their circumstances. We have to be gentle. Otherwise, our attempt at encouragement can just sound like shaming someone, or kicking someone when they are already down. We don't want to do that, of course, and wouldn't do that on purpose, but it takes emotional intelligence to realize when someone is and isn't ready for that sort of really direct encouragement.

But when the time is right, find those opportunities to share this comfort.

Christian, your suffering right now is being used by God. He is using it for your joy and holiness right now, and he will use it to help you comfort others later.

Conclusion

In his first epistle, Peter says something really incredible. Worthy of its own sermon, and it's just two verses. But listen to this:

“In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pe. 6-7).

Charles Spurgeon understood this testing by fire perfectly. He knew that the trials we face are not accidents; they are the very tools of our sanctification. Looking back on a life filled with his own deep suffering, he once said:

“I bear my willing witness that I owe more to the fire, and the hammer, and the file, than to anything else in my Lord's workshop. I sometimes question whether I have ever learned anything except through the rod. When my schoolroom is darkened, I see most.”

Brothers and sisters, I am so happy to tell you that God will never waste your pain. Every event in our lives is a precisely configured instrument in the hands of a sovereign, loving Father who is carefully shaping you into the image of his Son. That's his goal for you.

We will groan, we will weep, and we will struggle. But we can also rejoice, knowing with absolute certainty that for those who love him, God is working absolutely *all* things together for our ultimate, eternal good.

Let's pray.