

Romans 8:26-28

Good morning and thank you for joining us. You have lots of choices of places in which to fellowship, and we're grateful you're here with us. Would you please turn in your bibles to Romans 8?

Last week we ended our study in verse 25, and we spent a lot of time talking about sufferings we endure on earth, and how those pale in comparison to the glory we will experience in Heaven.

This morning we're going to continue to see what Romans 8 has to say about suffering, and we'll pick up our study in verse 26, and make it all the way to verse 28. Only 3 verses this morning.

Let's read verses 26-28 **26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us[fn] with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.**

28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

The title of this morning's message is **RESPONDING TO SUFFERING**

Let's pray.

I had a lot of time to wander down memory lane this week, as I on the road a lot. Earlier in the week Kim and I were in NY to do a funeral, it was about 14 hours round trip. Then on Thursday there was a pastors huddle for all the calvary pastors in the great lakes area in Indianapolis. For me driving time is praying and thinking time!

And as the miles of travel slowly ticked by, my thoughts turned to these 3 verses in Romans 8, and the people whom I've met just in the last few years who've suffered unimaginable hardships.

There was the mom whose teenage daughter went for a walk, heard a cry for help from her neighbor's house, walked inside, and witnessed a little boy being sexually assaulted. The neighbor then killed the teenage girl who bravely tried to help.

There was baby Ethan, I saw his parents every week at Cincy Children's. The prognosis was good, baby Ethan would get to go home soon. And then I received the call, and rushed to the hospital to learn that baby Ethan suddenly and inexplicably died in his mothers arms the day before they were to go home. An unimaginable horror as a parent to walk into the hospital with your child, and leave without him.

My old friend from NY, her name was Renee, a wonderful godly mom, who because of the super dense fog didn't see the semi pull out in front of her, and her car drove straight into, instantly killing and decapitating her, as her 3 teenage daughters survived the horror in the back seat.

2 weeks ago, I showed up on scene as a 33 yr old man died suddenly in his living room, no signs of drugs or foul play. I was on the phone with his wife of 10 years as she was travelling, scoping out locations to celebrate with family the 10 year wedding anniversary of her suddenly deceased husband.

Last week a husband and wife got into an argument, the wife left to clear her mind. The husband went onto the back deck, pulled his gun, and killed himself. The bullet shattered the playroom window where his 12 yr old and 4 yr old kids were playing, just feet from him.

I could go on and on. I know that every person in attendance and listening online today has their own stories and experiences with suffering. None of us is immune from difficulty and tragedy.

The nineteenth-century British preacher Joseph Parker once said, "Preach to the suffering, and you will never lack a congregation. There is a broken heart in every pew."

The bible makes NO attempt to gloss over the truth we all know- We live in a broken and fallen world, and often times it's filled with suffering. Even for followers of Christ.

Yet the Bible is also very clear in the perspective we as believers are to have when we endure suffering. Because having the proper perspective while suffering is crucial to our spiritual growth.

I recently read the story of the captain of a Navy ship who looked into the dark night and saw faint lights in the distance directly in front of him. Immediately the captain told his signalman to send a message to the other vessel- 'alter your course 10 degrees south.'

Promptly a return message was received- 'alter your course 10 degrees north'

The captain was instantly angry- face began to boil- his command had been ignored. So he sent a second message- 'alter your course 10 degrees south- I am the captain!'

Another message was received- 'alter your course 10 degrees north- I am seamen 3rd class Jones'

The captain knew his 3rd message would invoke immediate fear- 'alter your course 10 degrees south I am a battleship!'

Then the stunning reply came- 'alter your course 10 degrees north- I am a lighthouse.'

When it comes to pain and suffering, perspective matters.

Last week we saw how all of creation groans in verse 22, all of humanity groans in verse 26, and there is a 3rd, glorious groaning that takes place;

26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us[fn] with groanings which cannot be uttered. When we're weak, and don't know how we should pray, God Himself through the Holy Spirit helps by making intercession for us.

I bet most, if not all of us here in this room have gone through experiences so brutal, so catastrophic, that we found ourselves with nothing left in us in which to try and muster up a prayer. The circumstances so daunting and overwhelming that our spiritual wind gets knocked out of us, and we can't even find the words to pray.

When I've had those moments in my life, where I'm so grieved, I have no words, I know the HS is interceding. He is praying for that which I am physically incapable of.

A few days ago marked the 10 year anniversary of my brother pulling out his handgun and killing himself in front of a random group of strangers. And I reflected on getting that phone call, the 8 hr drive back to NY, and I remember how I was just in such a state of shock, and grief, and confusion, I couldn't really muster any prayers. But praise God the HS was interceding when I couldn't do it!

When we are so overcome and overwhelmed by the waves of suffering, the HS communicates to God the Father in ways that are beyond our ability to express.

Imagine a loving parent seeking to help their child who has a speech problem or hearing impairment. As the child struggles to

express their feelings and desires, the parent imparts knowledge, and with their own lips, carefully tries to formulate what the child wants to say.

This is a picture of how the Holy Spirit catches up our deepest longings and brings them in line with the Father's ultimate purposes for us.

This is a glorious truth! Whenever we find ourselves in those times where we don't even know what to say, take heart, the HS does.

And this is a powerful reminder to every believer-there is no failure in praying, only failing to pray.

27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. When we pray, we need to remember that while prayer is to be directed to God, our prayers are not to be directing God.

Tragically for many, perhaps even most Christians, their prayer life is all about trying to direct the Lord, thinking that's what prayer is about.

"Let me explain the situation, Lord. Here's what You need to do," we often say.

But praise God, Jesus is there to make intercession for us, according to God's will! Aren't you so glad you haven't gotten everything you've prayed for! Now we'll see next week but you can peek at verse 34-Jesus intercedes for us when we pray.

So notice the role of the trinity in our lives. The Holy Spirit groans through us, Jesus intercedes for us, and the Father will do what's right concerning us.

28 And we know (not we think, not we hope, we know) that all things (not some or most but all) work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. This verse does not say that God causes all things—period. Nowhere in Scripture do we read that God causes sin or evil. Rather, this verse says that God brings good out of all things, even tragedies, for the Christian.

The causes of tragedy are Satan, the sinful choices of people, and the consequences of living in a sinful world. Satan, sin, and sinners.

Yet the fact remains that the difficulties we're dealing with have been allowed by God. And this is where we struggle sometimes isn't it. How could God in His goodness and love allow us to experience the heartache we deal with? It's the age old question of why....

I'd like us to take a couple of minutes and look at an uncomfortable fact in scriptures. We travel to the garden of Gethsemane, before Jesus' arrest.

Luke 22 41 And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, 42 saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." 43 Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. 44 And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

An angel came and ministered to Jesus in the garden! BTW-can you imagine if Peter, James and John hadn't fallen asleep, look what they missed out on by not praying-they could've witnessed an angel ministering to Jesus.

But fast forward several hours later, the murderous torture of the scourging took place, the crown of thorns was shoved on Jesus'

head, the spikes had been pounded into Jesus hands and feet. He was on the cross, experiencing what you and I could never imagine.

And notice carefully.. **Matthew 27:46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"** And heaven was silent.

There is no indication that any angels ministered to Jesus on the cross like they did during His temptation, or like they did in the garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus cries out why, and Moses and Elijah aren't there ministering to him like they did on the mount of transfiguration.

Jesus cries out 'why'-and heaven was silent.

Can you relate? Crying out to God, only to be faced with the deafening silence of heaven as you struggle?

Often times our perspective is wrong.

See the question isn't really why, the question is who-and the who is God.

28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

Verse 28 confirms for us that God will use that which we don't understand how it could ever be good, to be good!

Think of it like baking a cake. A cake needs flour, sugar, shortening, eggs, vanilla extract and some other ingredients.

In of themselves, these ingredients aren't very good. I don't know of anyone who pulls some vanilla extract out of their pocket!

But mix all the ingredients together, under enough heat and a long enough period of time, and out comes a cake.

SHOW PIC 1 On the town square in Enterprise, Alabama there's actually a monument to the boll weevil. Years ago this rural, farming town made its living off King Cotton, until a swarm of boll weevils invaded their fields, and threatened permanent ruin. As it turned out the creative farmers of Enterprise were forced to switch to peanuts that year. And to their surprise, when harvest time came they made more money from peanuts than they had ever made from cotton. They never went back to the cotton. The affliction of the boll weevil became a windfall to the town's economy. And to acknowledge their appreciation the farmers set up a monument on the town square. Go to Enterprise, Alabama today, and you'll see a marble and bronze statue of an ugly boll weevil. **CLOSE PIC**

We too need to have reminders of how God has taken the difficult circumstances in our lives, and transformed them into something good.

Right above the computer monitors in my house is a sign that I treasure. My eyes lock with this sign as it stares me in the face at countless times a day. **SHOW PIC** It's a simple, but crucial reminder, for the sign says 'leave it at the cross'. **CLOSE PIC**

The very things that create the stresses in life, and anguish, and the fear will one day be the cause of great rejoicing. It reminds me that no matter what I'm facing, the cross promises God will make something good of it, even if I don't understand how.

SHOW PIC Reinhold Messner is a famous mountain climber. He was the first of two men to climb Mount Everest without an oxygen tank. Then he decided he needed to climb the mountain by himself - and he succeeded. Afterwards Messner was asked

the standard question all mountain climbers get asked, "Why did you do it?" He replied, "Because at the top all the lines converge."

CLOSE PIC

Each one of our lives is a portrait that God is in the process of painting, and no matter how random the lines seem right now, eventually every brush stroke will come together just as God intended.

How can we be so sure of this? Because it's not a few, or some, or most... but "All Things... work together."

The Greek word translated in verse 28 by the phrase "work together," is the word "soon-erg-eh-o" - from which we get our English word "synergy."

And here's how the Webster's dictionary defines the word "synergy" – it's the "cooperative action of various elements to produce an effect greater than, and different from, the sum of each element acting separately."

And this is what God does.... He brings together the various circumstances of our lives, even the heartache and bitter disappointments, He brings them together in such a way that the ultimate, over-all, in-the-end outcome is good.

But the problem you and I share is one of perspective. See what I call good is usually centered around my physical needs and emotional desires. But what God calls good, centers around our spiritual needs and His desires.

SHOW PIC OF CRAZY MANSION See I think it would be good for God to call me to plant a Calvary Chapel in Maui, on a cliff a few thousand feet in the air with giant 20 ft floor to ceiling windows. Hey those people need Jesus too right? And I could

surf, and minister to the guys out there surfing-that sounds good to me. **CLOSE PIC**

But that's not necessarily good according to God!

God's intention in the trials of this life is not some cheap, superficial, selfish version of good... God wants to produce a solid, eternal good! It's what we've been studying now for several weeks-the word sanctification-the process of being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ.

I want you to notice though that God's promise in these verses is not an open-ended offer. This wonderful word of comfort and hope only applies to those who "love God" and "are called according to His purpose." If you're not a disciple of Christ, you don't have this assurance.

God wants to fashion us into the image of His Son Jesus, and this is done through sanctification, and often times sanctification is produced through trials.

SHOW PIC When Michelangelo finished his statue of "David" the great artist was asked how he had created such a masterpiece. He answered, "I saw a figure trapped in the stone, and I chiseled away the rock to free it." **CLOSE PIC**

And this is how God looks at us. He sees the inner man - made perfect and righteous through the blood of Jesus - but it's surrounded by rough, shapeless rock. So God allows trials and circumstances to chip and chisel to reveal the new creation in Christ.

Folks as Christians for all of eternity we'll enjoy peace. Our destiny is eternal blessing. Right now, is our only opportunity to be shaped by hostility or pain. This is why God is not timid or squeamish to put us through the fire.

God doesn't hesitate to use a little momentary pain to shape and fashion a permanent change in our lives. CS Lewis once said, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but He shouts to us in our pain. Pain is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

Spiritually speaking, pleasure tends to lull us to sleep, but pain grabs our attention!

SHOW PIC The cocoon of the emperor moth is funnel-shaped. When it's time for the moth to leave the cocoon it rises through its narrow neck. The moth squeezes through until it escapes. Biologists tell us it's the pressure on the moth's body, as it compresses through the opening, that releases the juices that fill the vessels in its wings, and ultimately causes those wings to fully develop. **CLOSE PIC**

Once a little boy saw an emperor moth struggling to shed its cocoon and fly to freedom. Out of pity he took some scissors, and snipped the threads of the cocoon to make the exit easier. But without the applied pressure, the wings never properly formed, and the moth spent his brief life crawling rather than flying.

And when our priority in life is to try to escape life's pressures, and run from the struggles - we never properly develop. We miss out.

Folks, Jesus is our example for enduring struggles on this earth.

At the cross of Calvary, God took history's greatest tragedy, and turned it into the greatest victory. What appeared to be a catastrophe, God worked it for good!

Through the death of His only Son, salvation came to all mankind.

Hebrews 2:9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and

honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

God specializes in taking hopeless and crushing situations, and giving them happy endings!

Have you noticed that in our sufferings we learn things we didn't know we needed to learn?

How many times have you looked back at your life, only to see how some of your darkest moments, God has turned into good?

How often in the bible do we see God transform sufferings into something good?

Did God cause King Saul to try and murder a shepherd boy about to be king name David? Of course not. Did God use that for good and His glory-absolutely.

How about Peter-did God cause Peter to deny Christ? Of course not. Did God use it for His glory-yes look no further than the book of Acts and 1st and 2nd Peter.

Did God cause Potiphar's wife to try and commit adultery with Joseph? Of course not. Did God use that for good and His glory later on after Joseph was in prison? He sure did. **Genesis 50:20**
"But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."

When I watched my mom die in my dad's arms as a young man, it sent me down a pretty dark path. I was running a CVS at the time, and not long after got so frustrated with senior citizens yelling at me cuz I was out of vitamins, I quit my job with no back up plan.

The next job I got is the one that eventually led me to meet Kim.

Did God cause my mom to get cancer and die like that? No-did God use that situation for good-oh He sure did.

Or again just thinking of my brother's death. I cannot tell you how many suicidal people I have been able to counsel because of my own experience not just with my brother, but with my uncle and others whom I personally know who took their own life. Did God cause my brother to kill himself-of course not. Has God used that for good-for me to be able to tell others about Jesus-absolutely

I remember a couple of years ago I had to go to Nashville for a meeting. On my way I stopped at a Christian bookstore, and long story short began talking with a suicidal man who was in the bookstore.

Not everything is good, but God causes all things to work together for good. And not only that, God will comfort us.

2 Corinthians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.

So often our tendency with our hurt, our pain, and our suffering is to stuff them all down real far where no one can see.

But I want to encourage you to rather put your sufferings on a frame for all to see, that God may be glorified in it and through it.

As long as we have breath in our lungs, we know our sufferings are not yet finished. We will experience more. How are we going to respond in light of these 3 verses in Romans 8? I pray it's the counsel of....

Prov 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all your heart,

And lean not on your own understanding;

6 In all your ways acknowledge Him,

And He shall direct^[fn] your paths.

When tragedy and hardship make an unexpected arrival in your life, I pray you will have the same perspective as Job

Job 23:10 But He knows the way that I take;

When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.

11 My foot has held fast to His steps;

I have kept His way and not turned aside.

12 I have not departed from the commandment of His lips;

I have treasured the words of His mouth

More than my necessary food.

What it all comes down to, is faith. Do we trust that He is God, even in our darkest moments?

Do we trust that He will use our tragedies, for His definition of good?

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

How's your faith this morning?

You can't have faith without trust

You can't have trust without a relationship

You can't have a relationship if you're not willing to spend the time.

Before you leave here today, ask someone how you can pray for them. and pray with them on the spot.