

## **THE MOST ENCOURAGING VERSE IN THE BIBLE**

**Romans 8:28**

**By Andy Manning**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. The title of this series is “Not Shaken.” It comes from 1 Thessalonians 3:2-3, where Paul sent Timothy to the Thessalonian church to encourage and strengthen them in their faith so that they would not be shaken by affliction. This series is all about how to face adversity without being shaken.
2. What does it mean to be shaken by affliction? To get angry with God and run away from Him. To self-medicate with drugs and alcohol. To try to cover the pain with sin. To try to solve the problem with sin. To panic with fear and worry and anxiety. To lose your faith in God. To get angry and bitter, taking it out on those around us. To seek revenge. To get depressed. To end our lives.
3. Everyone goes through hard times. Even Christians. The benefit of being a Christian is that God has given us special tools and resources so that we can face hard times without being shaken.
4. One of the best tools God has given us to help us with adversity is to remember His promises. It’s been said that the Bible contains 8,000 promises for God’s people. Let me remind you of some.
  - i. The promise of pardon. God promises to forgive your sins. **Psalm 103:3** “He forgives all your iniquity”
  - ii. The promise of paradise. God promises to give you eternal life when you die. **1 John 2:25** “And this is the promise that he himself made to us: eternal life.”
  - iii. The promise of Parousia. God promises that Jesus will return one day. **Acts 1:11** “This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen him going into heaven.”
  - iv. The promise of payment. God promises to reward you in heaven for all the good do on earth. **Matthew 16:27** “For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will reward each according to what he has done.”
  - v. The promise of peace. God promises inner peace in all circumstances. **Philippians 4:7** “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”
  - vi. The promise of protection. God promises to protect you from any harm that is outside His plan for you. **Psalm 18:30** “He is a shield to all who take refuge in him.”
  - vii. The promise of provision. God promises to meet all your needs. **Philippians 4:19** “And my God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

- viii. The promise of providence. God promises to use everything that happens to you for your good. **Romans 8:28** “We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”
- 5. Romans 8:28 has been described as the greatest promise in the Bible. In a nutshell it means God is always at work in your life, and that no matter what happens to you, God will use it to benefit you.

## II. FIVE GREAT TRUTHS FROM ROMANS 8:28<sup>1</sup>

### 1. This is a definite promise.

- i. “We know.”
- ii. This is not a theory, hypothesis, assumption, or a possibility. This is a certainty. We know that God will work all things together for our good.
- iii. How do we know?
  - 1. Because this is God’s word, and God never lies.
    - a. **Psalm 19:7** “The instruction of the Lord is perfect, renewing one’s life; the testimony of the Lord is trustworthy, making the inexperienced wise.”
    - b. The Bible is not like the news or social media, which are not trustworthy. Sometimes people lie on purpose, and sometimes they accidentally get it wrong. The Bible is always right.
  - 2. Because of the stories in the Bible.
    - a. We can look back at many examples in the Bible of this playing out.
    - b. The story of Joseph. When Joseph was a teenager, his older brothers sold him into slavery. Then Joseph was falsely accused and sent to prison. But through divine providence Joseph was elevated to the position of Prime Minister of Egypt, where God used him to save his family and many others from famine. Later when Joseph was reunited with his brothers he told that he could see how God used everything that happened for his good. **Genesis 50:20** “You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result—the survival of many people.”
  - 3. Because of our own story.
    - a. **William Barclay** “We do not need to be very old to look back and see that things we thought were disasters worked out to our good; things that we thought were disappointments worked out to greater blessings.”

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<sup>1</sup> This outline comes from Dr. David Jeremiah.

- b. Years ago I applied for a promotion at FedEx, and I didn't get it. At first I was so upset and disappointed. But just a little bit later I applied for a different promotion and got it. Only later was I able to see that if I had gotten the first promotion, I would have hated the job, and it would not have been a good fit for me. But the promotion that I did get was the perfect position to fit with my ministry schedule.

**2. This is a divine promise.**

- i. "All things work."
- ii. In my Bible there is a footnote that says, "Other manuscripts read *that God works together in all things.*" In other words, this verse is not saying that things just somehow work out. That they mysteriously align in your favor. It is saying that God is at work in your life, making things work together for your good.
- iii. **James Anderson** writes about the religion of Deism in his book, *What's Your Worldview*. "Deism is the view that there is a God, but he remains 'at a distance' and doesn't intervene at all in the natural workings of the universe. For the Deist, the universe was created by God, but it now operates entirely according to natural principles, such as the laws of physics, and there are no supernatural events such as miracles or divine revelation (e.g., God communicating with us through prophecies or vision). Deists sometimes use this analogy: God is like a watchmaker who designs and constructs a watch, but after winding it up, he lets it run on its own, with no further supervision or intervention."
- iv. That is not at all what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches that God not only created you, but He is highly interested in you; He cares about You; He watches over you at all times; He knows everything about you, what you do, say, think, and feel; and He is working in your life to care for you, to protect you, to discipline and grow you, to guide you, to speak to you, to heal you; and He is with you, near you, and in you at all times. Let's look at some verses.
- v. **Deuteronomy 32:6** "Isn't he your Father and Creator? Didn't he make you and sustain you"
  - 1. God didn't just make you. He sustains you. In other words, He keeps you alive. He keeps you going. He keeps your lungs working, your heart beating, your blood flowing. He makes sure that you have food, clothing, and shelter.
  - 2. Paul said it differently in a sermon. **Acts 17:28** "For in him we live and move and have our being"
  - 3. Notice how Paul described Jesus. **Colossians 1:17** "He is before all things, and by him all things hold together."

- vi. **Psalm 139:1-5** “1 LORD, you have searched me and known me. 2 You know when I sit down and when I stand up; you understand my thoughts from far away. 3 You observe my travels and my rest; you are aware of all my ways. 4 Before a word is on my tongue, you know all about it, LORD. 5 You have encircled me; you have placed your hand on me.”
  - 1. God knows you. He watches you. He knows your thoughts. He knows what you are going to say before you say it. He encircles you – He is always near.
- vii. **Proverbs 3:5-6** “5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways know him, and he will make your paths straight.”
  - 1. God guides you. He is making sure that you go where He wants you to go, and that you end up where He wants you to end up.
- viii. God cares about you deeply, and He is working in your life so that everything that happens to you will be for your benefit.

**3. This is a definitive promise.**

- i. “All things.”
- ii. This is a comprehensive promise. All things. Not just some things. Not just the good things. God works all things together for your good. The good, the bad, and the ugly. Sickness, failure, rejection, pain, loss, sorrow, and even sin. God will work it all out for your good.
- iii. One preacher put it like this. “All means all, and that all that all means.”
- iv. There are two things that “all” does not mean:
  - 1. This doesn’t mean that all things are good. Sin, suffering, sickness, sorrow, death, failure, cancer, sex-trafficking, and natural disasters are not good in and of themselves. They are evil. But God is able to take the evil things that happen to us and use them to benefit us in the long run.
  - 2. This doesn’t mean that God only allows good things to happen to His children.
    - a. Just read your Bible and you will see that all the heroes of the Bible, all of God’s favorites, from the patriarchs, to the judges, to the prophets, to the kings, to the apostles, and to Jesus Himself, had to experience adversity. Just read through Christian history and you will see that all of the men and women that God used to do great things had to experience great trials.
    - b. The idea that if you have enough faith you can live a life of health, wealth, and prosperity and escape all suffering and hardship is unbiblical.

c. Just look at the apostle Paul. Paul was a missionary. He wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament. He was a very godly man. He had big faith. Yet listen to him as he describes the hardships that he experienced as he served God on the mission field. **2 Corinthians 11:24-27** “24 Five times I received the forty lashes minus one from the Jews. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked. I have spent a night and a day in the open sea. 26 On frequent journeys, I faced dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own people, dangers from Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, and dangers among false brothers; 27 toil and hardship, many sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, often without food, cold, and without clothing.”

v. Still, God will work all things together for your good.

#### **4. This is a dynamic promise.**

- i. “Together for the good.”
- ii. When we are in the middle of a trial, we can’t see how it is going to work out for our good. It doesn’t feel good. It doesn’t feel right. It feels bad and wrong. But don’t worry, because God is working behind the scenes to make it all work out for your benefit.
- iii. Together, in Greek, is *sunergeo*. It’s where we get our English word “synergism.” Listen to this definition of synergism: “the working together of various elements to produce an effect that’s greater than and often completely different from the sum of each element if they were acting separately.”
- iv. When you take the ingredients of a cake and eat them alone, they taste bad. A plate full of baking soda, a plate full of sugar, a plate full of salt, a plate full of flour. Yuck. But when the baker puts them together in just the right way, they make a delicious cake.
- v. Or consider this. By itself sodium is poisonous. And by itself, chlorine is poisonous. But when you put them together, you get table salt, and it makes your food taste delicious.
- vi. By themselves, the bad things in your life are just that; they are bad. But God doesn’t let them stand by themselves. Like a skilled baker, or a genius chemist, He takes all the things that happen to us and mixes them together so that something wonderful emerges.

#### **5. This is a defined promise.**

- i. “of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”
- ii. Every promise in the Bible is conditional.

- iii. This promise is not issued to everyone. It doesn't say that God works all things together for everyone. It is very specific. It says that God works all things together for Christians, and it describes Christians in two ways.
  - 1. Those who love God.
    - a. A Christian is not one who merely believes in God. Remember that the devil believes in God. A Christian is not one who merely believes that the Bible is true. The devil believes that the Bible is true. A Christian is a person who loves God.
    - b. What does it mean to love God? It's the same as love for your spouse. It involves affection and action. The love you have for your spouse involves affection, emotion, and feeling. But it's more than that. It involves action. It involves your behavior. You care for them, and serve them, and meet their needs. In the same way, your love for God should involve affection and action.
    - c. Affection:
      - i. **1 John 4:19** "We love because he first loved us."
      - ii. Because of what God has done for you, you should feel deep, strong affection for God. You should think highly of God. You should have a strong desire to be near God, and to grow closer to Him, and to know Him more.
    - d. Action:
      - i. **John 14:21** "The one who has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me."
      - ii. Ultimately the true test of love is not your feelings, or even your words (e.g., saying, "I love you so much!"). It is action; specifically obedience. True Christians are obedient.
      - iii. This doesn't mean that true Christians never sin; that they are perfect; that they never mess up. But true Christians strive to obey God; they want to be more and more obedient; they want to please God; they want to honor God; they want to glorify God; they want to serve God; they don't want to offend God; they don't want to hurt the cause of Christ. And when they mess up, they feel awful. A true Christian can backslide, but they can't be happy while they are backsliding. They are miserable until they return to the Lord.

iv. Martyn Lloyd-Jones had an interesting observation. He said that they one of the best ways that you can test your love for God is by your response to adversity. Some people seem to be Christians, and they seem to love God, until they run into adversity. They thought that being a Christian meant exemption from the trials of life, so when the trials comes they get angry with God and give up. They conclude that the Christian life was not worth it. The cost is not worth the benefits. But when the going gets tough, when everything seems to be going against you, if you don't turn away from God, but instead run to Him for strength and help, then you truly love God.

2. Who are called according to His purpose.

- a. Christians area also described as those who are called according to His purpose.
- b. The word "called" is one of the more controversial terms in the Bible. It brings up the debate between Calvinism and Arminianism.
- c. According to Calvinists, the "called according to his purpose" are the elect.
- d. Calvinists believe in two "calls." First, the general or universal call, which is the preaching of the gospel to all people, the elect and non-elect. Second, there is the effectual call which is given by the Holy Spirit to the elect, which results in their regeneration followed by their faith in the gospel. Those "who are called according to his purpose" are the elect, those who have received and responded to the effectual call.
- e. The effectual call is tied to two core Calvinist doctrines -- unconditional election and irresistible grace. These are the "U" and "I" in TULIP (the famous five points of Calvinism). Why does God only effectually call some to salvation and not all. Because according the doctrine of unconditional election, God, from eternity past, has chosen to save a few (the elect), while leaving the rest of humanity to die in their sins and go to hell. God's election is unconditional because it is not based on any condition that man meets -- not faith, or repentance, or anything else. Why is the effectual call "effectual"? Because according to the doctrine of irresistible grace, when God calls the elect to salvation He doesn't merely give them the ability

to have faith, He regenerates them to ensure that they will have faith without fail.

- f. Both doctrines -- unconditional election and irresistible faith are unbiblical. Let's briefly look at each one, starting with unconditional election.
- g. It is clear that God loves and desires to save everyone.
- h. **1 Timothy 2:4** "[God] wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."
- i. If God wants to save everyone, then why doesn't He choose to save everyone? Because salvation is conditional upon faith. While salvation is available to all, it is only given to those who put their faith in Jesus Christ.
- j. **John 3:16** "For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."
- k. What about irresistible grace? The Bible teaches that grace is not irresistible. Jesus Himself often expressed sincere disappointment that so many of the Jews were resisting Him.
- l. **Matthew 22:37** "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"
- m. **John 5:40** "But you are not willing to come to me so that you may have life."
- n. These people resisted God's grace. Why? Was it because they were not effectually, irresistibly called? No. Jesus clearly states that they rejected God's grace because they were "not willing." Why would Jesus blame them for not accepting Christ if their reason for rejecting Christ is because God did not effectually call them? In other words, why would Jesus blame them for not accepting Him if they were unable to accept Him? Why blame them for not doing what they could not do?
- o. I disagree with the Calvinist interpretation of Romans 8:28, that those "who are called according to his purpose" are the elect who have been effectually called.
- p. A more biblical interpretation of Romans 8:28 is that the "called" represent Christians who have been called to become like Christ. I agree that there are two calls in Scripture, but I disagree with Calvinists about the nature of the two calls. The first call is a universal call (invitation) to all men to believe in



Jesus for salvation. In this sense, everyone is called, both believers and unbelievers. The second call is a special invitation to believers to become like Christ. Believers have been called to God's purpose of Christlikeness. This comes out in the very next verse.

- q. **Romans 8:29** "For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters."
- r. The "called" in Romans 8:28 are those who God foreknew and predestined for "his purpose," that of being conformed to the image of his Son. To them it is promised that God will work all things together for their good.

iv. So, Romans 8:28 is a defined promise. It is for believers.

### III. CONCLUSION

1. Romans 8:28 means that the incidents in our lives are not incidental, and the trials in our lives are not trivial. God will use it all for our benefit.
2. Romans 8:28 doesn't say that God works all things out the way you want them. Because we don't always want or know what's best. It's best to leave that in God's hands. He knows what is best.
3. Romans 8:28 doesn't say that God works all things together for my pleasure. Often what feels good is not good for me. Often what is pleasurable is not beneficial. Often what feels good is not what's best for me. God works all things together for my good.
4. **One person** said, "The truth of Romans 8:28 can change the way you think. It can provide a corresponding shift in your moods, emotions, and outlook. In time it can actually transform your personality, alter your circumstances in life. It can turn troubled souls into people of confidence and good cheer. It's the secret of resilience and irrepressible joy. And this promise has your name on it. It meets the challenges you are facing right now. It's God's guarantee."
5. When I was a kid my preacher was Perry Sanders. We used to call him Brother Perry. At one point he broke his hip, and when he was in the hospital he told a visitor, "You know, the Bible says that all things work together for the good. Well, I'll tell you, there's nothing good about this broken hip." He paused and then with a smile he continued. "Except I've been able to share the gospel with everyone who has come in my room."
6. Romans 8:28 is a verse to memorize so that when you go through a hard time, this is where your mind goes.
7. Let's close by quoting this verse one more time.
8. **Romans 8:28** "We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."