

Faith Fights to Believe Romans 8:28

A sermon in the series
What Faith Must Fight For

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Romans 8:28

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.

If we knew an inconvenience or even a problem would bring something good to us, we could endure it. For example, if we knew beforehand that missing a flight would save us from some great tragedy we would most gladly miss the flight. If we knew that by standing in a long line that we would be spared a horrific traffic accident then most happily we would stand and wait. It's also true we would not be upset at some difficulty if we knew, even if not beforehand but at the very moment, we were being spared a worse problem. Such as getting a phone call in the middle of the night as God's way of getting us up to smell the smoke, we would not be upset we had been awakened by the phone.

All of these examples presuppose us knowing how something bad was really for our good. It necessitates that we know, if not beforehand then at the very moment they are occurring, *this is going to work for my good, therefore I can endure it.* But the problem is we seldom know beforehand or even at the time that the problem we are facing is working to our good. In fact, most often we don't know even after the event is taking place the reason for it. Most tragedies in our life go unanswered as to His purpose; therefore we must rely on God by faith. All the more we must trust Him, and when faith seems weak it is all the more important to fight to believe God.

That's what this message is about. I want to encourage us all to fight even when we don't understand. Even when all God is asking is raw faith with no understanding, no purposes, no reasoning.

I especially pray for the person here today who has yet to trust Jesus Christ. I pray that you do not demand of God an explanation of how your life shall turn if you should give Him your life. I pray that you don't ask for every 'i' dotted and every 't' crossed, what shall happen from this moment on if you give your life to Christ. I pray that you will simply, and in childlike confidence, give God your heart and life because you do trust Him.

I pray that as we all look at this very familiar text we look at it with fresh eyes.

I. ALL THINGS ARE NOT GOOD

The text does not say that everything that happens to us is good. It doesn't say that at all in the Bible. There is no doctrine that says bad things are not bad, evil is not evil and tragedy is not tragedy. No, all things are not good and sometimes, if not often, things that happen to us are bad. Christianity is not a slight of hand where we play mind games and do like the postmodernists and change definitions, "Oh that wasn't bad that was good." No. If it hurts it hurts. If there is pain, even the truth that God is working all things to good does not lessen it but makes the pain hopeful. It is so sad that we often try to encourage people to keep a stiff upper lip and tell them not to get down and not to weep. What do you mean not weep? Who created the tear ducts? Who created the ability to produce those tears? And did He who created tears not also shed them?

It is a false hope to tell people that tragedies in life are good when they aren't. God doesn't say that in this text and we shouldn't twist it to say such to others as we try to encourage them. This text is not saying a loved one's death is good. This text is not saying cancer is good. Nor is God saying a spouse leaving a husband or a wife is good, or that losing your job is good. The Bible is not saying a child born with a deformity is good. That isn't good. The text is saying that God can use these things to *produce* good. They're not good and faith does not pretend they are. Unfortunately there are many people who believe that is the definition of faith—pretend as if the bad is really good. Do not claim the evil they say. There are many who suggest that is what faith is and if you're going through a difficulty don't claim it. Don't acknowledge it. Just convince yourself that it's good and that God is working and that somehow what you're seeing is not exactly reality but something else. You must see it as good. I refuse to believe that, friend. That's not faith it's fantasy!

You can claim something to not be true all you want to. The man burning in hell today can say "my faith will not claim this," but he is suffering nonetheless. The man lying in ICU with terminal cancer can say, "By faith I claim this isn't happening to me," but he's still dying. What kind of message are we sending to a world when we say this is faith? Even in their worldly rationale they can understand that doesn't make sense. Faith doesn't pretend. Faith knows all things are not good.

II. FAITH FIGHTS TO BELIEVE IN GOD'S MYSTERIOUS PROVIDENCE

Providence. What does that mean? It just means that God is overseeing, superintending all of His creation including your life and every circumstance therein. Spurgeon said There is not a leaf that falls in the autumn that its course was not ordained from the tree to the ground by God.

God superintends and oversees everything that happens. And God's providence is often mysterious. There is a legend—and I stress *legend*—about Moses who was one day resting near

a well. This is not Bible and it's not a Bible story.

“A wayfarer stopped to drink from the well and when he did so his purse fell from his pocket into the sand. The man departed. Shortly afterwards another man passed near the well, saw the purse and picked it up. Later a third man stopped to alleviate his thirst and went to sleep in the shadow of the well. Meanwhile, the first man had discovered that his purse was missing and assuming that he must have lost it at the well, returned, awoke the sleeper (who of course knew nothing) and demanded his money back. An argument followed, and irate, the first man slew the latter. Whereupon Moses said to God, ‘You see, therefore men do not believe you. There is too much evil and injustice in the world. Why should the first man have lost his purse and “then become a murderer? Why should the second have gotten a purse full of gold without having worked for it? The third was completely innocent. Why was he slain?’

God answered, ‘For once and only once, I will give you an explanation. I cannot do it at every step. The first man was a thief’s son. The purse contained money stolen by his father from the father of the second man, who finding the purse only found what was due him. The third man was a murderer whose crime had never been revealed and who received from the first the punishment he deserved. In the future believe that there is sense and righteousness in what transpires even when you do not understand.’”

I know that’s a legend and there are some Scriptural problems with it, but the point is not its theological exactness. The point is this—there is much that happens in our life that we cannot explain because we don’t see any pattern, rhythm, synchronization, or harmony. For us, life is nothing more than a series of random events that seem to not be connected to one another and God is saying that is simply not true.

You’ve all heard the beautiful illustration of the grand weaver, have you not? When you look a beautiful tapestry and see the work of art, you marvel at its artistry and the way the threads all come together to make a stunning masterpiece. But flip it over and it’s anything but beautiful. There are strings going everywhere and knots and messes, nothing seems to make any sense. This is the point of that legend. From our perspective things don’t seem to jive and work but that doesn’t mean the mysterious providence of God is not working, it is.

I love the William Cowper hymn, *God Moves in Mysterious Ways*, and I think we need to learn it.

*God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.*

How many of you have ever seen a footprint in the sea? We’ve seen footprints in the sand and there’s even a beautiful poem about that. There are two sets of footprints that become one

where God carries us, but have you ever seen a footprint in the sea? I dare say none have and never will because there is no such thing. That is where God's path often leads, where you cannot trace His way and you have to trust His heart.

*Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.*

We don't understand God's providence. The clouds looks like rain but then God breaks it open and pours out a blessing you cannot contain.

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.*

That's Romans 8:28. *I don't understand this God, this isn't good.* And God responds, *You're right, it isn't. But soon you will see My smile because I have a purpose for you.*

*His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.*

*Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.*

I like that. God is His own interpreter. He will make it plain. However, He doesn't always make it plain in your lifetime. I think of you young people with your lives ahead of you, if you shall live to be at least to my age. As you finish school you have to make decisions and are wondering and trying to discern the will of God and it looks like a blank canvas and you have no idea what to do. Let me tell you something. God doesn't need to paint the picture before you live it. He's asking you to trust Him with your life and trust that He will use you and out of your life make a masterpiece. You may never know the beauty of your life until you have lived it completely and are in heaven so that God, who is His own interpreter, will then make it plain to you.

We understanding is not what the issue is, the question is can you trust Him when you don't understand? That is the kind of faith that honors God the most. I struggle in this way. I'm not here as an expert in trusting God in His mysterious providence, I'm simply saying I'm learning that God's will is best.

III. FAITH FIGHTS TO KEEP GOD AS IT'S OBJECT

This is so important. When you undergo the bad things in life, the bad things that God will work for your good, it's very important—if you're going to fight the fight of faith—to fight to keep God as the object of your faith. This is where we fail and therefore fall. We do not keep God as the object, the focus of our faith. We get sidetracked and begin to make the focus of our faith the problems. I want to talk about that. When you focus on the problem, immediately emotions flood in where faith ought to reign.

A. Emotions Fight Against Faith.

This is extremely important. This is one of the most important segments of this entire series and I can only ask God to share it with you as it is in my soul and make it clear and plain in my speech and understandable to you.

Faith is not an emotion. Please get this. So many of us would define faith as something we feel. As something we can sense working in us. Do you have faith, sir? "Oh yes, I have faith because I feel strongly my confidence in God." Whereas I might ask another, "Do you feel faith?" And they might say, "No, I feel so little confidence in God." The problem is neither answer has faith because faith is not an emotion whatsoever. It doesn't mean that your faith may not from time to time produce a feeling or sensation, but faith is not an emotion. **Faith is a confidence you have in God.**

Another way to say it is **faith is a conviction or a persuasion**. Go back to the text. Look at the word *know*. Paul does not define confidence or faith in God by emotions, he says rather,

*"and we **know** that all things work together for good,"*

Faith is an assurance, a confidence or a persuasion of the mind and of the heart that God is working for my good. However, when you make faith nothing more than an emotion or feeling then faith is minimized. When you feel strong in the Lord, then your faith will be high, but if you don't feel strong, you will think your faith is weak and you will minimize it. When you try to feel faith instead of walking by faith you lose the truth.

Let me explain. In order to be strong, faith has an object it keeps its eyes on and it's God, but in particularly the truth of God, the Word of God. That's the dependency of faith. It has to have the Word, which is the reflection of the character of God. If faith doesn't have that, it can't operate. You've got to have God and His character, which is reflected in His Word that He promised us, as the focus. But when you make faith nothing more than feeling strong in God, feeling His presence you've lost the truth. You've replaced truth with something very subjective, what you are experiencing sensationally within your mind and your body and when you try to feel faith you will always lose faith. Faith clings to truth not feelings. If you're to fight the fight of faith to believe Romans 8:28 you have to divorce your feelings from faith. You have to come to the conclusion

that faith may be devoid of emotions and can work mightily even when you don't feel it.

I want you to see how important it is to walk by faith and not by sight. It's so important that God will actually withdraw the feeling of God's presence because you enjoy the feeling more than you enjoy God. In other words, there have been experiences in my life where God seemingly removed His presence from me because I was enjoying the feeling, the sensation of His presence, more than God Himself. You say, *What do you mean by separating the two, don't they come together?* Well, you would think so but we are idolaters and we will begin to love the experiences that God gives us more than we love God. You ask how that's possible, well, it's the same principle of when God gives you something that you treasure and value, how easy it is to take that gift and value it more than you do God. How easy can a person, a husband, a wife, a child, a parent, a grandparent, become more important than the Lord? It's the same principle.

There are some of us who live so attune with our emotions that we determine if God is either smiling or frowning by the way we feel and God is saying, *You have turned Me into an emotion for your own pleasure and you've missed Me.*

Let me illustrate this by telling you what happened not too long ago in the second conference we had in Chisinau, Moldova. In the first conference in Ungheni, Moldova, we had about 30 pastors and an amazing time as we saw God work in these men. I experienced the presence of God and His power where I actually felt it and, I must admit, I'm one of those who is keenly attune to my emotions and I enjoy feeling God. I greatly enjoy the sense of being used by God. But when I got to Chisinau, I didn't feel that way at all and I became alarmed. I became frightened because I wasn't feeling the presence of God and a cloud came over me. I remember Joseph and Sophie both asking me what was wrong. I didn't know it was visible to them but I was walking with my head down crying out to God, "Where are You? I can't go in front of these men without You. I've got to have You, God." The more I prayed the more despondent my heart became. "God I've got to have You," translated to mean "God, I've got to *feel* you." God becomes replaced by an emotion. "God I've got to *feel* you then I can get in front of these men with confidence and preach and teach."

The more I prayed the less confidence I felt and the more despondent and fearful I became. So what did I do? What I learned to do a long time ago. I had to get the Bible. All I had was a few more minutes, so I'm sitting back in the audio/visual area where Joseph and Sophie were and I had my iPad and got my Bible open and went to one of the texts I often run to, Isaiah 41, where God promises that He would not reject me but that I was His servant and He would help me and strengthen me by His right hand. I kept reading it over and over and over and over and over and I felt absolutely nothing. But I walked to the pulpit confident that this was God's Word and it had to be so whether I felt it or not.

As soon as we began to speak, within minutes, the power of God came and I did feel it. I felt it so strongly that for the rest of the trip I had to guard myself against that emotional high I had experienced because faith doesn't walk by those things. We don't walk by emotions, we don't

walk by our physical senses, we walk by faith in knowing *because God said it, it has to be so.*

Where do these emotions come from? This is what's so important for you to see. Some of them are involuntary, meaning you don't willfully choose to feel the way you do, especially when you're going through a difficulty and would rather be happy. You want to rejoice again, you want the sun to come out and the clouds to be dispelled, but you can't help the emotions. There are days you feel things and you don't know why you feel down or depressed. But those days are the exception.

Mostly emotions come from our thoughts and wrong emotions come from wrong thoughts. Wrong feelings, wrong emotions that actually dispute and argue with the truth of God and fight against your faith, come from wrong thoughts. They come from the observation of what we see. *This is not fun. This is not easy. This hurts. This is going to turn out bad.* We heard someone testify this morning how a fear came into their life and immediately thoughts came in to their mind of every bad solution. Every thought would turn upon a disastrous ruin and as a result fear only increased and faith took wings and flew away. Wrong thoughts produce wrong feelings.

If you have little confidence in God my first question to you is "What are you thinking about? What are the thoughts you are concentrating on?" We make an observation from what we see and this is where the deception can start. You observe the facts correctly; you see the situation as it is. *I am dying. The doctor gives me six weeks. The prognosis is not good at all.* You can see the facts correctly, but with those facts you make wrong conclusions. It's just like a scientist in a science lab. He gets the microscope, he gets the burners out and he does all the tests. He observes how the substance is impacted by certain stimuli, heat and cold and he dissects and observes all the facts of his observation, but his mistake is when he puts the facts together and comes to a wrong analysis, a wrong conclusion, and that's what we do. It is those things that fight against your faith more than anything else does. That's why the Bible says we cannot walk by sight.

So I want to give you some biblical tools to help you fight.

B. How to Fight to Keep God as the Object of Faith.

Let me give you five things.

I. Faith must fight to not see the circumstances only.

I've got to see the circumstances, I've got to see the facts, see what's happening, but I cannot just see that alone. I've got to look to God, particularly His benevolence, His kindness and His goodness. That is where I've got to focus. Why? Because Romans 8:28 says all things work to the good of those who love Him. I know this is bad and these are difficult things I'm going through. I observe all the potential problems and pitfalls, but I can't see that alone. I've got to also put into the vision of my heart God's kindness, God's goodness, and God's benevolence. That has to be part of the equation otherwise my analysis will all be wrong about the circumstances. Faith trusts

God's character. **In the end, faith is nothing more than trusting God is who He says He is—good.** Because of that, faith has to fight to not just see the circumstance, but also see God.

2. Faith fights by recalling stories of God's providence working all things to good.

As I told one man several years ago, God doesn't want you to live on the stories of George Muller, He wants to write your own stories of His faithfulness to you. God is building a track record in your life. We see that with David, don't we? Before his battle with Goliath he rehearses for himself as well as for King Saul the story of killing the bear and the lion. Those were the acts of God's deliverance in the past, and David was recalling how God worked even in bad things to produce good ends. This is what you must do. And even if you can't think of any of your own you've got a book full.

Pharaoh decreed to kill all male babies but that led to great deliverance on behalf of one of those babies and it led to the nurture and education of Moses in Pharaoh's own household. Providence works to take that which is evil and turn it for a good purpose.

Samson's capture and his eyes gouged out led to his greatest victory over the Philistines.

Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery became the very salvation of those brothers.

Saul of Tarsus plots the death of Stephen but in that God plots the salvation of Saul.

We see this time and time again in the Word of God. This is what you have to do—you have to go back to the Word.

In 1966, Mao Zedong said he would eradicate Christianity from all of China. Never again would a prayer be prayed to the God, Jehovah. Never again would a student learn the Bible verses. Never again would the cross be told and sung about in churches. And millions of Christians died. But out of the blood of those martyrs has arisen a church so strong that some estimates are about 150 million Christians in mainline China. I heard recently that a high official in the government of the People's Republic of China, who has been converted, who also testified there are others in the government who are coming to Christ. It's a matter of time before the Gospel will take an honorable people, as the Chinese, and show them the glory of God in the Gospel and cause that nation to prosper because of it. I believe that China will become one of the most fantastic, glorious peoples of evangelism and missions second to none. That's how God works.

He takes Saul, a blasphemer and persecutor, and turns him into one of the greatest missionaries of all time. Don't tell me God can't do it again! He's not on vacation, He's not sleeping, He's working in your life, sir, in your problems, in your pain. You've got to recall His providence of working all things to good.

3. Faith fights to believe that our spiritual development is better than our physical development.

Faith has to fight to believe that despite what's going on in my body, what's going on in my financial situation, even what's going on in my physical family, my spiritual good and its development is better than all of these things, even more than my physical life and wellbeing. Do you believe that? If you really don't believe that you will struggle to believe Romans 8:28. That verse is built on the premise that not everything turns out well, physically, financially or relationally. Homes do split up, children do rebel, stocks and bonds evaporate, jobs terminate, and loved ones die. So goes the human race and so goes it until He comes back. We are foolish to think we shall escape these calamities. Through much tribulation we enter the Kingdom. My hope is that in these problems and adversities God is working my spiritual development, which is far better than my body prospering.

I'm sure you have heard of Joni Eareckson Tada. She's a quadriplegic who, at the age of 17, severed her spinal cord as her head dove into murky waters and struck a rock. Before that event, just a few months, she had prayed, "Lord if you're really there, do something in my life to change me around, I'm begging you." Three months later she's lying in a hospital room wanting to take her life. When she failed to do that, she said, "God, if I can't die, then show me how to live." And we know the rest of the story? In 2010 she was diagnosed with third stage breast cancer and has been fighting ever since, but her spirit has not diminished one degree. I want you to hear what this person, who knows Romans 8:28 better than I, says.

"I'm convinced a believer can endure any amount of suffering as long as he's convinced that God is with him in it. And we have the Man of Sorrows, the most God-forsaken man who ever lived, so that, in turn, He might say to us, "I will never leave you; I will never forsake you." God wrote the book on suffering and He called it Jesus. This means God understands. He knows. He's with me. My diving accident really was an answer to that prayer to be drawn closer to Him."

Her faith is strong because her spiritual development is more important than her physical development. Do you believe it's better to be spiritually wealthy than to be financially rich? Do you believe it's better to prosper in your soul than in body? Do you believe it's better to be in closer relationship to God than anyone else on this earth? We must believe this.

Fanny Crosby was asked about her eyesight. She said, "Do you know that if at birth I would have been able to make one petition it would have been that I would be born blind? Because when I get to heaven the first face I shall see shall gladden my sight and that will be of the Savior."

She believed her spiritual development was far better than being able to see. To see spiritually was better than to see physically. You've got to believe that. You've got to fight to make that one of your fundamental tenants, foundational beliefs, if you're going to prosper in difficulty.

4. Faith believes life is not wasted.

Everything is working God's purpose in His children. Everything. Nothing is wasted when God's on the throne and He's always on it. I have to be personal here to make this point.

I often hear my emotions or Satan or both say to me that I've wasted a great deal of time in my life. When you get where I am in life you begin to look back and see more years behind you than you do ahead of you, unless I live to be 104 years old, then I've got less ahead of me than I do behind me. But I often feel like I've wasted my life and my ministry. I realize I've not always been a good steward of time. I think, "Lord, I've labored for all of these years and this is all I've got to show for it." But I can testify that is "stinking thinking." It is thinking not based upon the truth that God ordains my inheritance. The truth is He establishes the boundaries of my influence and ministry and life. And if this is all God has appointed me, then let me embrace it joyfully believing this is not a waste but good. This has been good.

Let me tell you where this is leading. Karen and I are getting near the 20-year mark of being pastor here and 20 years ago God made a promise. Sometimes I think with 20 years gone by and the promise unfulfilled that maybe I've blown the opportunity. I didn't say that it wasn't God, because I know He talked to me. I know what He said to me. But I think I've blown the opportunity and that I've not been faithful enough or worked hard enough or done enough. I want you to hear what God has been saying to me in the secret place.

"Michael, what you're thinking is a wasted time has been preparation for you and for your brothers and sisters. It hasn't been a waste. Every day that you thought could have been more productive I was doing something. I was being productive. I was making you the way you are right now."

Do you hear what I'm saying? Faith has to fight to believe that God's not wasting my life, that every minute is counting even when I don't understand or see how. Faith must fight to realize God is really involved in my life.

You've got to believe that God is involved with you, all of the time. Nothing is wasted. All of it is part of His plan.

5. Faith fights to believe the will of God is always best.

If our ministry and church never expands any further, it is good if it's God's will. It's better than good, it's the absolute best because He sees the picture. You thought I was going to say He sees the big picture. No. You don't even see the picture. You don't even see one little pixel of it. He gets the whole picture and He understands why we need what we need when we need it. And you have to believe that.

Therefore, our faith must fight to believe no matter what happens God is working His best for us. If medical afflictions come into my life and limited my ability to preach, I am persuaded that

would be good for me.

We've demonstrated that to you before, have we not? Have Karen and I not shown you when Victoria was born? We believed having a daughter with Down's syndrome to be the best thing for us and we stood upon that principle. Why? Because I'm convinced in who He is and what He is—He is loving. He defines love. God is love. There is no love without God. You're going to tell me that He blesses me and purposefully brings difficulty in my life for any reason other than He loves me? Friends, I believe with all my heart there is no other reason for it. He loves me so He brings difficulty because it's what's best for me and I'm persuaded of that.

As I bring this message to a conclusion I need you to hear me. Child of God, unless you know for a fact you are disobeying God, where you are today is the absolute best for you. But if you can see nowhere where you are disobeying God, then whatever the circumstance, whether it is work related, who you're married to, children, where you live, every detail about your life is the absolute best. It's God's will for you and you can rejoice in it. Otherwise your faith will struggle.

IV. THIS PROMISED GRACE IS CONDITIONAL

It's conditioned upon two things:

A. It is Conditioned Upon Loving God.

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God,”

Now if I was to ask everyone in this room, “Do you love God?” I believe everyone here would say, “Oh yes, I love God.” But that doesn't mean you do. It doesn't mean you love God biblically the way He demands. If you would have asked me if I loved God before I was saved I would say I did. And I did. But I didn't love Him the way He intended me to love Him. I had great affection for Him, and how can you not like somebody who blesses you?

So often we mistake those feelings of like as love because of the good things we receive, when it's really what He does for us that we love. I didn't ask you if you loved Him that way. The Bible says He demands to be loved with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. In other words, you love Him more than you love this life. Do you love God with that kind of love? God says if you do, I'm going to work everything that is hurtful and painful in your life for your good. You may not understand it, you may not even know it until you get to heaven.

Do you love God so much that you're willing to obey God? Because in the end that's what the Bible says, “If you love Me, obey Me.” If you love God with the kind of love that joyfully obeys and submits to Him, then I say this promise is for you. But if you cannot say I love God to the point that I'm willing to do what He wants me to do and do it because I love Him, then this verse does not apply to you. All things will not work to good in your life and all the problems you've

experienced in this life will have been wasted and your life will be wasted with it and there will be a sudden calamity on those who refuse to love God.

B. It is Conditioned Upon God's Calling.

“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.”

I know there is a lot of strife over the doctrines of predestination and election. I know that. But I cannot stay away from truth just because some people want to argue over it. It's true, God has called and chosen to eternal life. I'm so glad He does and that He did because I wouldn't be saved apart from it. I'm so thankful for the doctrine of God's calling, that effectual call, the divine election before the foundation of the world for those who should be saved because it is the very pillar upon which the Gospel of Grace rests, for without it there can be no grace. God has to be without any obligation or restriction made upon Him that He should save any of us. God has to be absolutely free in His choice to save if it's grace. If it's obligatory in one degree or one ounce, my dear friend, it's no longer grace but merit. But there is no merit to our salvation, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). I thank God that He has called me and I know this verse is mine.

How do you know if you're called?

It's simple—you love God. Don't make this more difficult than what it ought to be.

How do you know you're a Christian? How do you know God has called you and separated you unto Himself? Because you love Him.

How do you know you love Him? Let me conclude by telling you how.

No matter what happens in your life, good or bad, eventually it works more love in your heart toward God.

How do you know you love God? When bad things happen you may be angry or frustrated with God at first, but eventually that subsides and the Spirit of God works through the bad to cause us to love God even more because we believe He is working His good purposes in our lives. That's how I know I love God. That's how I know any of you love God. When the adversity and trials come against you, you don't wilt and fall away, you persevere. You stay the course. You survive it. But you don't just survive, you come out saying, *let me tell you what God's done for me. How much more I love God now and I'm so thankful He brought me through that.* That's what those who love God say, every time.

But the person whose anger toward God does not subside but works bitterness in his or her

heart toward Him is not “the called according to His purpose”. Has that adversity worked in you more bitterness and resentment to God? Then you are not His child as of yet. But I want to extend to you the Gospel call yet again. You can be His child. If you are willing to put away your anger and say, “God, forgive me, for I have had no cause to be angry. You have given me life and You have given me even my afflictions because You loved me, to show me I am not sufficient in this life by myself. You have shown me Your love, bringing me to the conclusion that I am a guilty sinner worthy of your damnation.”

Sir, take your problems, take your life story that has been twisted upside down and full of a lot of pain and see the hand of God in it. Would you please? See that it's God saying to you, *Those who chafe against My yoke will suffer. Those who struggle against My commandments and will for your life only end up being the one hurt. If you'll submit to Me, I'll not only heal you but I'll strengthen you and use you and work everything, even the things of your past, every sin you've committed, I will work it toward your good and My glory.*

That's what God extends to every sinner in this room. We talk about God wiping away our sins and removing them as far as the east is from the west, that's true. The Bible says that and thankfully there is no record against me; no sin is held to my charge and for this I'm most grateful. But, friends, God does something with those sins. He doesn't just remove them from our record, but He uses them to work a future good because that's the kind of God of love and grace He is. That's the kind of God of power He is, that He can take your broken, messed up life and take all of the years you say are wasted and turn them into His glorious good.

Let me give you one example and I'll be finished. What good could have come out of a life of debauchery, thievery and murder, as the life of the man on the cross crucified with Jesus? Who, in the last hours of his life, saw the truth by the grace of God and was gloriously saved, pronounced by the Master Himself, “Today you will be with Me in paradise.” What good could come from that wasted life? There is no way to turn around that life, there is no way to show any good out of that. There was no way to make up for all those years. But I say to you, you underestimate God. Don't sell Him so short, my friend. God has used that thief on the cross and all those wasted years to reach a lot of thieves and murderers and extortioners and sinful people to give them hope in their last hours of their life. All of those years were not wasted. God has used it. And I want you to hear me—God will use you. I have great hope for you. God will use you as a trophy of His grace because all things, we know, do work for good to them who love Him and are the called according to His purpose. Amen.