

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

August 17, 2025

Does the Bible Really Say That?
“Everything Happens for a Reason”
Romans 8:22-28
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A Korean War veteran by the name of Laurel Hunsinger told friends and family that, “When I worked on the flight line in Korea and flew combat missions, there was a post set in the ground that everyone had to walk past. Someone had carved into the post these words: ‘You always have two chances.’ When I asked what that meant, I was told that when you fly a combat mission, you have two chances: You’ll make it back to the base or you’ll be shot down. If you are shot down, you have two chances: You’ll survive the crash, or you won’t. If you survive the crash, you have two chances: You’ll evade the enemy or you’ll be captured. If you are captured, you have two chances: You’ll live through being a prisoner or you won’t. If you die as a prisoner, well, you still have two chances.” Incidentally, in 1953, Laurel’s plane was shot down 15 miles inside North Korea. Though severely injured, the entire crew survived and was rescued. To some people life might seem like a series of events controlled only by random chance. For others they believe God or fate has already determined every detail of our lives.

A phrase that we often hear people say is, “Everything happens for a reason.” Often people say that when they have walked through a series of challenging events in their lives. While that phrase is not a quote from the Bible it does raise some interesting questions as to how much control does God have of the details of our lives and if God is in control how much control do we have over the details of our lives? What we learn in Scripture is that God is the Sovereign God who has given us a free will to work with Him or against Him. Thankfully, God promises all of us who love Him that He will take the good and the bad in our lives and use them to accomplish His perfect will for our good.

Romans 8:22-28

For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us. ²⁴ We were given this hope when we were saved. (If we already have something, we don’t need to hope for it. ²⁵ But if we look forward to something we don’t yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.)

GOD IS IN CONTROL AS THE SOVEREIGN GOD

Here in *Romans 8*, Paul has been describing the life of Christians on this side of heaven as one of painful groaning as we long to escape the suffering of this life and to be in person with our Heavenly Father. As we wait for that day to come with great longing, we do so in the sure hope that when that day finally comes, our bodies will be resurrected, we will share in God's glory, and there will be no more pain and suffering. Is it true that all this suffering happens for a reason? To answer this, we need to first start with God. Who exactly is God? In reading the Bible we learn that God is eternal. God has always existed and will always exist. God exists in our timeline but is not bound by our timeline and as a result God is in the past, present, and the future. God is the Creator who made all that we can see and all that we cannot see. As the Creator, God is All-Powerful. Nothing is too hard or impossible for God. God is All-Knowing. God does not need to learn anything new. There is nothing we can tell God that He doesn't already know. God is also All-Wise. God always knows what is right and wrong or best and worst in every situation and circumstance. God is also Perfect, Holy and Just which means God always does what is right, what is best. Finally, God is All-Loving. God not only loves perfectly but He is love personified and therefore, every aspect of God, every thought, motivation and action of God is governed and determined by His love.

God is the Sovereign Ruler of all that was, is, and ever will be. As such, God has a master plan of the direction all history is ultimately moving toward which we could call God's redemptive plan. *Ephesians 1:9-11* says this about God and His plan, *"⁹ God has now revealed to us his mysterious will regarding Christ—which is to fulfill his own good plan. ¹⁰ And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth. ¹¹ Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us in advance, and he makes everything work out according to his plan."* God is seeing to it that all of history is moving ahead toward this plan. The question is how much of the details of this plan does God control? As a Christian who holds to more of a Wesleyan theology, I understand there to be two extremes. One is called, Calvinism, named after John Calvin. That is the belief God directs and controls every single detail in the entire universe. This view makes God out to be the cosmic chess player and us as being pawns who have absolutely no control over what happens in the game of life. On the other extreme there is Deism which is the belief in the existence of a supreme being, who has specially created the universe but does not intervene in the details. In Deism, God is like a watchmaker who, after making the watch, gives it away and never has anything else to do with it.

Instead, what we understand as Wesleyans, as Methodists, is the Bible teaches that God is undoubtedly working in the details of our everyday lives as the sovereign ruler over all creation and as such He is ultimately in control. In God's infinite knowledge, wisdom, power, and perfect love, God always knows what is best and does what is best to bring His plan to fruition. Without a doubt the Bible God shows God ***both causes*** things to happen, and He also ***allows*** things to happen. Chip Ingram says this about the sovereignty of God: "There is absolutely nothing that happens in the universe that is

outside of God's influence and authority. As King of kings and Lord of lords, God has no limitations." When all is going crazy around me, I find consolation in my faith in God who somehow, beyond my ability to fully understand, is in control, not just sometimes, but at all times, not just with some things but with all things, in both the good and the bad.

In the second church I served as a pastor when I was somewhere in my mid 30's, the church was growing with many young, new believers, and I was practically running myself in the ground working nonstop just trying to keep up with the growing demands. One day, when I was pretty overwhelmed feeling like I was Atlas carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders, I came into my office and found a sheet of paper on my desk that some anonymous person printed out for me. The first thing I noticed about the note was that it had a picture of half sun with a smiling face and its rays shining out from it. I then noticed the words that went something like this, "Dear Mike, I'll be running the universe. You can take the day off. God" I needed to hear that God was in control and far more capable to run the universe and especially the church I was serving. I still need that constant reminder even today that God is the Sovereign God who is in control, and I am not!

GOD CREATED US WITH A FREE WILL

Not only does the Bible teach us that God is the Sovereign Ruler, but it also shows us that as the Sovereign Ruler, ***God Created Us with a Free Will***. At the beginning of time, God created Adam and Eve and then said, all that I have created is yours; develop it, manage it, be creative with it, enjoy it, live life to the fullest. God told Adam and Eve that it is all theirs with only one prohibition, do not eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God gave humanity a choice to follow God's perfect plan or reject it. We now know that eventually Adam and Eve used their free will to throw a wrench in God's perfect plan for them and all creation. God allowed Adam and Eve to bring sin, suffering, and even death into this world. It broke God's heart but God gave them a choice and allowed them to live with the consequences. The same continues today. God allows us to make choices to work with Him in His perfect plan or to work against Him. Maybe instead of asking why does God allow suffering we might more accurately ask why do we continue to bring suffering upon ourselves as we do things our way instead of according to God's good and perfect plan.

One of the best illustrations that has helped me to better understand the relationship of God's sovereignty and human free will in A.W. Tozer's book, *Knowledge of the Holy*. Tozer writes, "An ocean liner leaves New York bound for Liverpool. Its destination has been determined by proper authorities. Nothing can change it. This is at least a faint picture of sovereignty. On board the liner are scores of passengers. They are not in chains, neither are their activities determined for them by decree. They are completely free to move about as they will. They eat, sleep, play, lounge about on the deck, read, talk, altogether as they please; but all the while the great liner is carrying them steadily onward toward a predetermined port. Both freedom and sovereignty are present here, and they do not contradict. So it is, I believe, with man's freedom and the sovereignty of God. The mighty liner of God's sovereign design keeps its steady course over the sea

of history.” God will see to it that His plan for history will eventually come to fruition at the end of time. Until then, as the passengers on God’s ship of redemptive history, while we cannot change God’s plan, we can work with God’s plan on the ship, or we can do everything in our power to frustrate God’s plan. While it is not a perfect illustration, cruise ship analogy helps illustrate that God’s sovereignty and human free will are not mutually exclusive. God’s overarching plan doesn’t negate the responsibility we have for our choices. God is sovereign, but He also allows for us to make choices within His plan. A.W. Tozer summarized it this way in *Knowledge of the Holy*, “God sovereignly decreed that man should be free to exercise moral choice, and man from the beginning has fulfilled that decree by making his choice between good and evil.”

GOD’S CAUSES EVERYTHING TO WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD

I am so thankful for God’s grace that even though God knows in advance we are going to struggle with His perfect sovereign plan, ***God’s Causes Everything to Work Together for Good***. This is a promise God makes for all of us who love God. No matter whether we have given into temptation and sinned, or no matter how great a trial we might be facing, God is working to bring about good in our lives. God in His infinite knowledge, perfect wisdom, always just and true, and in His unconditional love is able to work with our free wills to bring about His purpose. When life hurts, when it doesn’t make sense, God is still working to bring about good. The Bible unapologetically is honest and realistic. God tells us we will have negative, sometimes devastating experiences in life. However, Scripture also promises that nothing can separate us from the love of God, that God uses all our troubles to test, purify, and strengthen our faith, and God works all things together for our good. Ray C. Stedman writes, “If you want a wonderful experience, take your New Testament and use a concordance to look up the two little words, ‘but God.’ See how many times human resources have been brought to an utter end; despair has gripped the heart and pessimism and gloom has settled upon a people; and there is nothing that can be done. Then see how the Spirit of God writes in luminous letters, ‘But God,’ and the whole situation changes into victory.”

By far, the greatest example of this is found in God allowing Jesus to endure rejection, suffering, torture and finally death. It looked like a total loss, the worst tragedy possible when Jesus lay in the grave, “but God” brought about triumph through Jesus’ resurrection. Think about the good God brought about through Jesus. All that Jesus endured was for our eternal good. Jesus’ suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension provides for us the greatest good of forgiveness of sins, freedom from the power of sin, a relationship with God, and a new, redeemed life now and for eternity. How much more can God take our tragedies and turn them into triumphs? Dallas Willard rightly said, “For those who love God, nothing irredeemable can happen to you.”

Now God invites us to handle all our struggles just like Jesus did. Turn them all over to God, submit our entire lives to God, and trust that God will bring about good according to His good and perfect plan. God loves us with a perfect, everlasting love and if we will look to Him with our imperfect love, even in the most heartbreaking of circumstances God promises to bring about miraculous good. There is a quote that I printed out and

put in front of me on my desk that says, “Trust that He is working, even when you don’t see immediate results.” When all is going crazy around us it is reassuring to know that God is still in control and is working even if we cannot see it, to bring about good. Our response to what God is doing is to turn over our lives into the hands of the sovereign ruler of the universe and in so doing trust Him to take care of the details. As we do so, we will experience the peace of God which passes all understanding.

Jill Briscoe summarizes the choice we all have: “Resignation is surrender to fate; acceptance is surrender to God,” says Elizabeth Elliot. “Resignation lies down quietly in an empty universe. Acceptance rises up to meet the God who fills that universe with purpose and destiny. Resignation says, ‘I can’t,’ and God says, ‘I can.’ Resignation says, ‘It’s all over for me.’ Acceptance asks, ‘Now that I’m here, Lord, what’s next?’ Resignation says, ‘What a waste.’ Acceptance says, ‘In what redemptive way can you use this mess, Lord?’” It is our choice to either suffer in despair by handling our challenges without God or to turn our suffering over to God and trust Him to bring about His good and perfect will. God is inviting us to accept what we are facing and look with great expectation and trust in what good God will bring out of what we are facing.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES: (Books marked with * are available to be checked-out in the Asbury Discipleship Resource Center)

- *The Holy Bible* (Several FREE copies are available in the DRC)
- *Against the Flow*, John Lennox
- *Abide in Christ*, Andrew Murray
- *Transforming Grace*, Jerry Bridges
- *Knowledge of the Holy*, A.W. Tozer

Icebreaker I – Have you ever heard someone say, “Everything happens for a reason”? How did you feel about that statement in the moment?

Icebreaker II – Share a time when something difficult in your life later turned out to have a surprising or positive outcome.

1. Romans 8:22–25 describes creation “groaning” and believers waiting in hope. How does this passage shape the way we should view suffering in our daily lives?
2. The sermon contrasted two extremes: Calvinism (God controls every detail) and Deism (God does not intervene). How does the Wesleyan view of God’s sovereignty and human free will help you make sense of life’s challenges?
3. A.W. Tozer’s “ocean liner” illustration was used to show God’s sovereignty alongside human choice. In your own words, how do you see God’s plan at work while still having the freedom to make choices?

4. Romans 8:28 promises that God “works all things together for good” for those who love Him. How have you experienced this promise in your own life—or how do you struggle to believe it when life is hard?
5. Jill Briscoe (quoted by Elisabeth Elliot) contrasted resignation (“surrender to fate”) with acceptance (“surrender to God”). How can we practice acceptance in a way that deepens our faith instead of slipping into despair?
6. What impacted you most from the sermon? How might you apply this week’s sermon to your life?
7. How might this group pray for you this week?