

The Good God at Work for Our Good

A number of years ago when my 94-year-old mother was diagnosed with a life-threatening illness, my brothers and I moved her from a nursing home into an assisted living facility in a neighboring state. Not long afterward, my wife was having a milestone birthday. One of our daughters and her husband had traveled up from Florida to our home in North Carolina to celebrate with us over a long weekend. We were thrilled to have them as always. However, we were also concerned because with each passing day, it was becoming more apparent that my mother might be entering her final decline. We needed to go spend time with her, but had resolved to wait until our kids returned back home.

The day after my wife's birthday party was the kids' last day with us. Our son-in-law Paul woke up that morning and said, "I'd like to drive up to Richmond today to see Grandma" — a 5-hour journey roundtrip. We told him he didn't need to do that given the long trip home ahead of them, but he was determined. Seeing that he had made up his mind, the whole family decided to go together.

When we arrived in Virginia, the director of the assisted living facility invited me and my wife into his office. He told us, "Your mother is active." I said, "What does that mean?" He said, "She's actively dying." Well, that was a shock. Though we still weren't fully cognizant of what that meant, we were glad to have that information given that the staff of such places are keenly aware of the processes involved.

As it turned out, that was indeed the day that Mom died. We spent the entire day with her as she rested, holding her hand, reading her Scriptures, praying for her and telling her how much we loved her. The most important thing was that we got to be with her that day. We might not have had that opportunity had our son-in-law not listened to the prompting of the spirit of God and thus freeing us from any obligation we might have felt to stay home that day with them.

Not every day in our lives will be sweetness and light. But every day that we walk with God will be a day for us to see His goodness as a living reality, in a most personal way.

Genesis records time and again that “and God *saw* that it was good.” The first chapter of the Book of Genesis records seven (7) separate instances where God says exactly this. Let’s take a look at each one.

On the first day God introduced light and divided the light from the darkness.

Genesis 1:3, 4:

And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

And **God saw** the light, **that it was good**:...

On the third day He divided the earth from the seas.

Genesis 1:10:

... and **God saw that it** [that the earth was dry, and that there was a division between land and seas] **was good**.

He also caused the earth to bring forth plant life with seeds and fruits.

Genesis 1:12:

... and **God saw that it** [plants, trees, fruits and seeds] **was good**.

On the fourth day He set the sun, moon and stars in the heavens to give light upon the earth and to divide the light from the darkness.

Genesis 1:18:

... and **God saw that it** [lights in the heaven to illuminate the earth] **was good**.

On the fifth day He gave life to moving creatures in the water and the air such as whales, fish, birds, and insects.

Genesis 1:21:

... and **God saw that it** [filling the sky and seas with creatures] **was good**.

On the sixth day He gave life to moving creatures on land such as reptiles and tame and wild animals. Most importantly, He created man in His own image.

Genesis 1:25:

... and **God saw that it** [filling the earth with creatures, and subjecting the earth to His man and woman] **was good**.

Finally, after finishing His crowning achievement — mankind — it's recorded in

Genesis 1:31:

And **God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good...**

When God rearchitected the second heaven and earth, He wanted man to see that **His tailor-made home for man was in all respects very good**.

Psalms 27:13, 14:

I had fainted, unless I had believed to **see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living** [goodness is within our reach because He built it into His plan for us].

Wait on the LORD: **be of good courage**, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.

It's **the goodness of God that fills us with good courage**, for **the Lord is good**.

Psalms 34:8:

O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.

The Lord wants us to not only see but to **taste that He is good**. Sight and taste are among the richest of the five senses, underscoring the fact that God wants us to see Him at work in our lives in the fullest possible way.

Likewise, our good God would have us to experience in this life, not only His goodness, but also His tender mercies.

Psalm 23:6:

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Psalm 100:5:

For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.

Psalm 145:9:

The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.

Why do we need mercy and not just goodness? Because we are “carnal, sold under sin” as it says in Romans. We simply don’t have it in us to always do good.

Romans 7:21:

I find then a law, that, when **I would do good**, evil is present with me.

This truth is vividly illustrated by a shadow. One thing a man can’t shake is his shadow. No matter how hard he tries, it travels with him; it’s always present, sticking to his feet.

There is, however, one instance when a man can lose his shadow: when he leaps. In that brief moment, the shadow detaches itself from its bodily connection and hovers ever so fleetingly in the air. Sadly, the gravity of sinful flesh finally brings him back down to earth; only to be chained to his shadow once again.

Mercy is that moment when we jump for joy and literally become unstuck. What glorious times those are in our lives! Like an airplane taking off from a runway, we are momentarily catapulted into the blue, only to alight again several hours later when we land.

Speaking of God's goodness and shadows, let's take a look at

James 1:17 [ASV, or American Standard Version]:

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning.

Our God casts no shadow because He doesn't depend on an outside light source; He is Himself the Light. That is why every gift He gives — such as the holy spirit and the mind of Christ within us — is perfectly full of light.

Nehemiah and Ezra understood this. When they spoke of “the good hand of God”, they knew they were acknowledging that **all goodness starts and ends with God**. As Christ himself said, “**there is none good but one, that is, God.**” God isn't just Good; He's Goodness seven times over, as we saw in Genesis 1 — **He is perfect Goodness**.

In the Books of Nehemiah and Ezra, a remnant of Israel returned from Babylon to rebuild the wall and then the Temple in Jerusalem. When Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar's army, God's people were carried away in exile to Babylon. Nehemiah, the cupbearer for King Artaxerxes, lamented over the ruin of Jerusalem and prayed to the God of heaven for the rebuilding and restoration of the place that God had chosen. Miraculously, when Nehemiah was suddenly presented with the opportunity to make this petition before the king, Artaxerxes acceded, not only giving his consent, but also offering protection for the journey and the necessary materials to rebuild the city wall.

We then read in

Nehemiah 2:7,8:

Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah;

And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, [according to the good hand of my God upon me.](#)

Nehemiah 2:11,12:

So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days.

And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man [what my God had put in my heart to do](#) at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon.

Nehemiah 2:18:

Then I told them of [the hand of my God which was good upon me](#); as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work.

God had put in Nehemiah's heart the desire and conviction to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. This is here described in two ways: "for the good hand of my God was upon me" and "the hand of my God... upon me for good." [When the good hand of God is on a person, it is always for the good.](#)

Continuing with the record of the rebuilding of Jerusalem, let's take a look at Ezra and his role in ministering God's Word to the people who rebuilt the Temple.

Ezra 7:6:

This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, **according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him.**

Ezra 7:9,10:

For upon the first day of the first month began he to go up from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, **according to the good hand of his God upon him.**

For Ezra had **prepared his heart** to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.

Ezra 7:27-28:

Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem:

And hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes. And I was strengthened as **the hand of the LORD my God was upon me**, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me.

Why was Ezra able to prosper in his mission? First of all, because he had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, to do it and to teach it to the people. It was then that **the hand of the Lord his God — the good hand of his God — was on him.** And the result? Providence, protection and deliverance for the remnant of Israel.

Our lives will be greatly enriched when we look to God remembering that **He is always working for the good.** Because He knows everything about us, **God is at work for our good every day of our lives.** He is working for our good right up until the moment we take our last breath, and His goodness never fails.

Lamentations 3:22-25:

It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.

They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.

The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.

The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.

When we acknowledge that “the Lord is good,” we’ll start to see how God is at work in us *for our good*. God gently leads us and guides us, prompting us by the spirit to move forward in harmony with Him.

Philippians 2:13:

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

What is God’s good pleasure? Quite simply, to work for the good for those who love Him, all the time.

We see this precisely stated in Romans 8:28 in the New International Version, or NIV.

Romans 8:28 [NIV]:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Now that makes sense, because we have seen that God is good, always. However, it’s quite a different message than the one presented in the King James Version. The KJV reads as follows:

Romans 8:28 [KJV]:

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

What then is this verse actually saying?

There are two schools of thought on this verse, and the difference between them lies in what the translator decides is the subject of the verb, “work together for good”. From a linguistic point of view, there are two valid possibilities to consider:

- *All things* is the subject. (“*All things* work together for good.”)
 - This is the rendering chosen by the KJV, the ESV and numerous other versions.
- *God* is the subject. (“*God works for the good in all things.*”)
 - This is the rendering in the NIV, the RSV, the REV, and the New English Bible, to name a few.

Before we go any further, consider the fact that there’s a huge difference between all things working together for good and God working for the good in all things. So what’s the answer?

One good way of determining the subject of a passage is to examine the context. The preceding verses make our subject clear.

Romans 8:26 and 27:

Likewise the Spirit [God] also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself [God’s gift to us, holy spirit] maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

And he that searcheth the hearts [God] knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he [it, the spirit of God in us] maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

So if God is our subject, what actions of God are noted here?

- [Verse 26] “Likewise the Spirit [God] also **helpeth**”
 - God is always at work, helping us
- [Verse 27] “And he that **searcheth** the hearts”
 - God is the great Heart-Searcher
- [Verse 27] “**knoweth** what is the mind of the Spirit”
 - God knows how to communicate with us via His spirit

To cap it off, let me read the entire verse with you again from the NIV.

Romans 8:28 [NIV]:

And we know that **in all things God works for the good** of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

“In all things God works for the good of those who love him.” This is now the fourth action of God noted in this passage. “All things” is not the subject, *God* is the subject. **In all things, God works for the good.**

You’re probably familiar with the saying, “You know what you know, and you don’t know what you don’t know.” Applying that logic to this particular passage yields some interesting insights.

First, let’s talk about what we *don’t* know.

Verse 26 specifically mentions that “we know *not* what we should pray for as we ought.” When we’re honest, we have to acknowledge that we simply don’t always know what to pray for as we should: but **God helps us** and **God knows**. Fortunately for us, He’s not hiding the answers! He’s provided a means for us to pray in the spirit for the exact need in a language that is unknown to us, but that is perfectly well-known to Him. God can honor and answer that prayer, because its content originated with Him.

Second, let’s talk about what we *do* know.

As translated in the NIV, verse 28 states that “in all things God works for the good.” Well, isn’t that revealing? **One thing we do know with great certainty from throughout the holy Scriptures is that God is good, always.**

Can we say the same thing about the statement, “all things work together for good”? Is this something we know beyond a shadow of a doubt?

What if you were to ask the man on the street, “Do all things work together for good in this life?” His answer would undoubtedly be

something like, “Most certainly not! Anyone can see that we live in a world of wars, death, sickness, pain and suffering. Everyone knows all things do *not* work together for good.”

And you know what? You’d be hard pressed to argue with this logic, because not all things in this life do in fact originate from God. The concluding verses of Romans 8 give us a long list of the negative things men experience that originate with God’s archenemy, the adversary.

Romans 8:35-37:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

Nay, **in all these things** we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

So, if we know that God works for the good of those who love him in all things, just what are some of those things? Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril and sword. “In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.”

Romans 8:38, 39:

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Among the things that cannot separate us from the love of God are death, life, angels, principalities, powers, things present, things to come, height, depth, and any other creature. I’d say that’s a pretty exhaustive list!

Thank God that through our Lord Jesus Christ, **in all things God works for our good** and we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. Now *that* is an indisputable message of deliverance!