

Tomorrow night is our annual Church Conference when we report on how we have been in service to the Lord over the past year, and where, walking in faith, we hope to go in the next year. In a way, it's the closing of the books on the past year and the beginning of a new year. At times like this, there are always going to be questions about what the future holds for us as a church. The future is always a time of change, anticipation, excitement, and even some uncertainty. Now most of us don't mind a little excitement and even some anticipation in our lives at times, but we definitely don't like change and uncertainty. We like to stay in our comfort zone, but unfortunately, experience has taught us that this is not always possible.

Our scripture text for this morning is one that you may have heard before, and one that speaks of the assurance of hope during these times of change, stress and trials. It is taken from the eighth chapter of Romans, verses 28 through 39.

Read Romans 8:28-39

Before I retired from the Federal government, Judy and I lived just north of Santa Fe in a community called El Dorado. Since highways were my business and responsibility, I drove everywhere I went in this beautiful State so that I could get a better idea of the condition of our roads. One morning I left home around 5:30 am for a meeting in Roswell and then on to the State Highway Commission meeting in Artesia. I was driving down US 285 and was half way to Clines Corner when I hit fog. I mean fog, F-O-G with capital letters; it was so thick that you could cut it with a knife.

Of course, I remembered what I had learned in High School in Drivers Education; slow down and put your headlights on low beam. I couldn't see more than 3 car lengths in front of me and was only going about 35 miles per hour. You know how it is when you are in fog – can't see anything; everything closes in on you; you hold the steering wheel so tight that your knuckles turn white; you strain your eyes to see a little better; and you get this tight feeling in your stomach. Been there haven't you?

As I was going along slowly, I saw what appeared to be headlights ahead of me. Of course, having lived in New Mexico for some time, my first thought was: "is it a DWI and are they coming right at me?" Luckily, the vehicle was going in my direction and was a semi-tractor-trailer; one of those with lights all around it. This made me feel better; I could follow him. He would blaze the trail for both of us. However, after a while, I got impatient; he was going slower than I wanted to. So I thought about passing him, but fortunately better judgment prevailed. I realized that it would be dangerous, and that I would be safer following this truck, no matter how slow it was going. Just before Clines Corner, the fog lifted and there was the sun and the open road ahead of me.

As I was driving in the fog, I thought about how this experience was a lot like life. We are going merrily along on our way when the fogs of life set in around us causing uncertainty and stress, and sometimes even panic. We all have experienced some of these fogs: dealing with lawyers and covenants, health and financial problems, problems at work, broken relationships, concern for the well-being of our children and grandchildren, or the loss of a loved one. There are others that you could add to this list, but I think you see the point that I'm trying to make. It is at times like this that we feel like we are living in a fog!

Remember what they taught us about handling this in Sunday School, church and the Bible? Put your headlights on low beam and slow down. In other words, be still and know that He is God. Let God guide you through the fogs of life; put your trust in Him and walk in faith; as the old hymn says "Trust and Obey, for there's no other way." As you are going along, alone and a little uncertain about the path, God sends a friendly truck driver to show you the way. An experienced driver, a fellow Christian, someone who has been there before; who if you go with them will help you through this crisis.

However, like me, you may feel tempted to pass them and move faster, but don't. Don't get ahead of God; walk in faith, be patient; stay in step with the Lord. Remember all things in God's time. If you do, you will get through it. The fog will lift and the sun will shine again.

Now I didn't mention that once I left Clines Corner, I started driving faster to make up for lost time. Since we are in church, I better tell the truth; I was speeding. But that was okay because I was a highway engineer, and we were allowed to go faster than the posted speed limit in order to check out the geometric design of the roadway. Now I can see that some of you don't believe me. Neither did the State Police Officer who stopped me one day and I tried this same reasoning on him. He told me that he had never heard that one before and laughed as he was giving me a speeding ticket.

Anyway, I was moving right along and guess what? I hit another fog bank just north of Encino. That's life! When we get into a crisis, we dial 9-1-1 and call on God for help, but once out of it, we take off on our own again at our own speed only to find another fog bank. The point is that we need to make God our constant companion and not just when we dial 9-1-1.

Now fortunately I had an advantage as I was driving through this fog. I knew the road; I had traveled this section of US 285 many times. Also because I was a civil engineer, I was familiar with the geometric design of the roadway. I knew that there was a rumble strip to warn me when I was getting near the edge of the pavement. In the same way, those who have a daily quiet time of prayer and Bible reading can handle the fogs of life better than others because they are constantly communicating with God; they know the road and have been there before.

And therefore, when the fog sets in they feel more comfortable and secure that God will see them through the current situation.

The Bible is full of reassuring passages and promises that God is with us and will guide us through whatever may life throw our way. And our text from Romans 8:28 is one of the more familiar ones: "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."

William Barclay, the great Scottish theologian, indicates that in this verse, Paul is saying that all things work together for good, but only to those that love God. If a person loves, trusts and accepts God, if they are convinced that God is their all-wise and all-loving Father, then they can humbly accept whatever God sends their way; knowing that God like a good parent wants the best for them. Think about this way: you go to a doctor and he prescribes a treatment that is unpleasant and painful, but you accept it because he is an expert in his field.

And so it is with us if we love God. If a person does not love and trust God, then they may resent what happens to them. It is only to the person who loves and trusts God that all things work together for good; for to him they come from a Father who in perfect wisdom, love and power is always working for their best. We can all look back over our lives and see how things that we initially thought were disasters worked out for our good; in the same way things that we thought were disappointments turned out to be greater blessings.

In his book *Hope for the Troubled Heart*, Billy Graham tells the story about a lone survivor of a shipwreck who was marooned on a deserted island. The man managed to build a hut in which he stored everything he had salvaged from the sunken ship. He prayed each day to God for his rescue, and constantly scanned the horizon to signal any passing ship.

One day after searching for food, he returned to his hut and to his horror found it on fire. All of his possessions were destroyed and it seemed that all his hope for survival was gone. He fell to his knees in despair. But then on the horizon he saw a ship coming towards the island. When the Captain arrived, he said that they were headed in the other direction when they saw his signal fire! What initially appeared to be a disaster, instead turned out to be his salvation.

The Apostle Paul faced many hardships during his ministry, but he learned that if he trusted in the Lord and walked in faith God would take care of him. He had found the secret to life. Remember Paul's words that Chuck/Janet read from the fourth chapter of Philippians, verses 11-13: "... for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstance. I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation. Whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Now some people will mislead you into thinking that if you are a Christian and a good person, you will not have any problems. They will promise you a rose garden that life will be easy and you will be rich; they call this the “prosperity gospel.” But if you have been around the block a few times like I have, you realize that this is not true. C. S. Lewis noted that the trials in life are not an elective in the curriculum of Christian life; they are a required course.

The key is how you handle the fogs of life. What Paul affirms in our text this morning is that God co-operates in all things for the good of those who love Him. This leads to the discovery that even “the suffering of this present time” becomes a source of blessing. Now this is not an attempt to persuade us that evil things are actually good. They will always remain what they are; however, we need to realize that through Jesus Christ they have lost the power to defeat us. No matter how bitter the circumstances may be, we can learn to discover in them God’s co-operation. Actually, sometimes it is in the things which seem most to deny His goodness that we often find Him most present.

Unfortunately, many of us do not take advantage of God’s guidance and companionship. The power to transform bad situations into positive experiences is given to those who love God, who are called according to His purpose. When left to our own resources, suffering is more likely to harden and embitter us than it is to enable and help us grow closer to the Lord.

It is only through our personal relationship with the Lord that we are able to overcome the adversities of life. The more we walk in faith, the more we realize the full significance of God’s co-operation with us in all things. There will still be difficulties, but they lose their power to defeat our spirits because of the sustaining assurance that our resources will always exceed the demands upon them, because God is with us. The Lord does not deliver us from misfortunes; He enables us to find in them a blessing, not a curse. James M. Gray, a great Bible teacher, said: “Who can mind the journey when the road leads home?”

There’s the story of a British express train carrying Queen Victoria that was racing through the night; its powerful headlight piercing the darkness. Suddenly the engineer saw a startling sight; a strange figure in a black cloak standing in the middle of the track and waving its arms. The engineer grabbed the brake and brought the train to a grinding halt.

He and his fellow brakeman climbed down to see who had stopped the train. But they could not find any trace of the strange figure. On a hunch the engineer walked a few yards further up the tracks. Suddenly he stopped and stared into the darkness in horror. The bridge ahead of them had been washed out. If the engineer had not heeded the ghostly figure, the train would have plummeted into the river.

While the bridge and track were being repaired, the crew searched for the strange flagman, but couldn’t find him. It was not until they reached London that they solved the mystery. At the

base of the engine's headlight, the engineer discovered a huge dead moth. He looked at it for a moment and then on impulse wet its wings and pasted it on the glass of the headlight. Climbing into the cab, he switched the light on and saw the "flagman" in the beam of the light. In the darkness, it appeared to be the phantom figure, waving its arms. When Queen Victoria was told of the strange happening, she said: "I'm sure it was no accident; it was God's way of protecting us."

No, the figure the engineer saw in the beam of the headlight was not an angel ... and yet God, quite possibly through the ministry of His unseen angels, had placed the moth on the headlight exactly when and where it was needed. As stated in Psalm 91:11 – "He will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways." While most scholars believe that this passage applies to Jesus, who is to say that it does not include us His followers.

As Norman Vincent Peale said: "One of the most powerful concepts is the thought that God is actually with you and helping you. This is one of the simplest teaching in religion, namely, the Almighty God will be your companion, will stand by you, help you and see you through." I saw a bumper sticker that read: "God is the Pilot, I'm just the co-pilot." Now that's trust and that's wisdom. Wherever life leads you, let God be your constant companion. As you go through the fogs of life, let God be your guide, your companion, your headlights. And I promise you that you will get safely home. God speed. Amen