

We Know This...

Romans 8:28

27 December 2020 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

Big Question: How do we make plans for 2021?

Big Idea: We know that God uses all things for his purposes.

Welcome

G'day, merry Christmas to you all.

I'm getting in early because there's only 363 sleeps to go until Christmas!

But first, we've got to get to the end of THIS year.

As we come into the new year, I'd like to do something a little unusual for me, and that's to spend our time thinking about just one verse.

This's a great time of year to slow down and reflect deeply on the truths of God's word.

I didn't have this one verse read out because I know it will be familiar to many of you.

It's from one of my favourite chapters in the Bible:

Romans 8:28 NIV11 ²⁸ 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.

I'm going to ask that the Lord would help our holiday brains to be able to meditate on these words this morning.

Introduction

We've all got different ways that we like to make plans.

Some of us like of us like to make spur-of-the-moment arrangements while others prefer to make plans a long, long way in advance... like at least two or three weeks!

You probably can't tell what my preference is.

There are those who like to think for a long time and others who make plans in an instant.

Some like their plans to be locked in once they're made, while others are more flexible when it comes to making changes.

Many of us don't even know how we like to make plans and what we do might even change depending on the situation.

Regardless of how you like to make plans, more plans had to be thrown out the window in the last year than any of us would like.

2020 is the year that will remind all of us who lived through it that we're not in control.

I've seen some really organised people come to accept that sometimes plans just have to constantly change.

As we head towards a new year, we're probably all making plans for fresh start.

The optimists hope that the year ahead will be different, while the pessimists worry that we might be in for more of the same.

What's the best way to make plans for the year ahead?

We can GUESS what's in store for the year ahead, but none of us KNOW because we don't know the future.

We've all got the same questions and none of us have the answers we want.

While we mightn't have all the answers that we WANT, the advantage we've all got as Christians is that God's given us all we NEED to know.

We've got the answers we NEED to press on with confidence into the new year.

In just one verse in Romans 8, Paul reminds us of what we know.

He begins with "We know..."

We know God's plan and his plan gives us hope for the year ahead.

As we meditate and reflect on these words this morning, I hope that you're encouraged.

Outline

Romans chapter eight is all about life in the Spirit.

This particular verse is part of the bigger argument that Paul makes in verses eighteen through to thirty about God's glory.

The future glory we'll experience outweighs our present suffering.

Verse 28 contains five truths.

Actually, it would be better to call them convictions.

These are five things that we know, foundational convictions to carry us into the new year.

The Greek in this verse is actually quite flexible.

So, I'm going to mess around a bit with the order these truths might come in your Bible, but trust me that it's legit.

We know this...

#1 God works

#2 for good

- #3 in all things
- #4 those who love him
- #5 called according to his purpose

#1 God works

The first truth is that God the Father is always at work in the world through his Spirit.

That might sound quite obvious to you, but it makes him very different to other gods.

The God who's real is so different from the gods that people make up, which don't have that much power at all.

The God of the Bible isn't like the idols in Psalm 115 who can't do anything.

They can't speak and can't hear, all they can do is sit there and be carried around.

Psalm 115:7 NIV11 ⁷ They have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but cannot walk, nor can they utter a sound with their throats.

The God of the Bible is the Creator who made everyone and everything.

While having the power to create the world along with solar systems, galaxies and a whole universe is impressive enough, he's also the one who sustains the world.

God didn't just make the world and then walk away and forget about it.

He's constantly involved in the world every day making things happen.

We want God to be at work in the world when things go wrong, but we tend to forget that he's still at work when things are going well.

That's why it's so easy to forget God at this time of year.

In the middle of a university chemistry class, my lecturer said "And this reaction happens because these electrons move there.

"Actually, it happens because God makes it happen.

He just dropped that line in and it stood out so much because it was a reminder that things don't just happen "because".

Behind every chemical reaction, the movement of every atom, stands our God who's working in the world.

God makes the world go around, constantly sustaining all things by his powerful word, Hebrews 1:3.

He controls everything in his perfect knowledge and power, working all things according to his will, Ephesians 1:9.

Everything happens according to his plan and intention, and there isn't anyone who can stop him or get in his way, or stop him from completing his purposes.

Although he won't stop trying, even God's arch nemesis (the devil) is ultimately powerless to stop him.

Daniel 4:35b NIV11 He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

Our God can and does make things happen.

When life's going well, God is at work.

When we're asleep, God is at work.

When life feels like it's spiralling out of our control, God's at work.

When we don't know what the future holds, God's at work.

Knowing that God works gives us reassurance.

#2 for good

If God works and he's unstoppable, that makes him very dangerous.

He's like superman without any kryptonite.

Which is why it's so important to remember that God works for good.

God himself is good.

"Good and upright is the LORD," Psalm 25:8.

"God is light; in him there is no darkness at all," 1 John 1:5.

He was revealed to Moses like this: "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin."¹

Everything God does is an expression of who he is and so his goodness can be seen in all that he does.

God can't do evil himself and he won't allow evil go on unrestrained.

I don't know about you, but when I think about 'good' I tend to think about what's comfortable.

It comes out in the way I pray.

When I pray for someone who's sick, I ask that they wouldn't have pain and that they'd be healed quickly.

There's something right about that because the sickness and brokenness we experience every day was never part of the good world that God created.

If I'm really honest I pray for the other person's comfort because that's what I'm craving for myself.

God's good is so much bigger and better than mine though.

The "good" he's working for is about being like Jesus, verse 29, closer fellowship with God, bearing good fruit for the kingdom, and being glorified, verse 30.

When he's working for good, God's got more than just health and wealth in his sights.

This verse isn't saying that if you believe in Jesus, you're going to have more money than you know what to do with.

God's good looks like ending the constant fighting and bickering, and bringing peace between people, as well as between man and God.

Righting wrongs by dealing with injustice.

God's good looks like removing the struggle and disappointment and replacing it with joy.

In fact, he's not just working for your good, or even just for the good of the people you know.

He's working for the good of the whole creation.

Freeing the physical world from its frustration and decay, as Paul says in verse 21, and restoring a new heavens and new earth.

That can only happen by dealing with the root problem, the cause of everything that's NOT good.

Sin – our rebellion against God, our rejection of him and his ways – is what causes the badness we experience.

The mess that sin creates can only be mopped up by dealing with sin itself.

The baby in the manger was none other than God's rescue agent.

Christmas is a time for celebrating because God himself entered our world to deal with sin.

He came to die on the cross so that sinners can be set free.

That's the great event we remember at Easter.

God's working for a bigger, better good than most of us have in mind.

He's working to redeem and restore the world.

This gives us hope.

#3 in all things

Thirdly, God works for good in ALL things.

Yes, really, in ALL things.

Getting our heads around that takes some working through.

Most of us are probably reasonably comfortable with God working good in small and easy things.

But what about when good things go wrong?

When you get a broken bone from the new trampoline on Christmas day.

When that Christmas lunch gives you food poisoning or gall stones from too much good eating.

Sunburn from spending Christmas at the beach.

Or the roof collapses on your boxing day venue (like happened in Sydney).

Then it gets that much harder to see the good.

Paul's not so foolish that he thinks that life's going to just be easy like an endless summer holiday.

Life can be hard and difficult.

Paul, the guy who wrote this, was no stranger to a difficult life.

He was the dude who went around forging Christianity into new parts of the world.

He was a trailblazer for the gospel.

Surely, if that's what God wants, he'd make it as easy as possible for it to happen.

Not so much.

He faced all kinds of beating, hunger, adverse weather, sickness and even prison.

Paul was a graduate of the School of Hard Knocks.

If we take the time to look, we're often quick to see how God can use pleasures, but not so quickly how he'll use pains.

However, he can use loss just as much as gain.

Spiritual progress often comes in failure and tears rather than success and laughter.

Cheers as well as tears, calm as well as storms, if God's working good in ALL things, then it will include these as well.

Please don't mishear or misunderstand.

Suffering and tribulation don't look good because they're not!

This isn't an attempt to baptise sin and pain and hurt and call it good.

Sin is sin and there's nothing good about it.

The effects of sin are never pleasant and enjoyable, and the pain that our sin causes is real.

That is even more true than most of us understand.

But it's ALSO true that God is even able to use bad things for good.

It doesn't mean that God wants bad things to happen or even that he encourages them.

But he uses things that don't even look like they're good for his good purposes.

God directs all things – even the bad ones – so that the outcome is always beneficial.

Romans 8:28 does not mean, that everything will turn out okay in this life, but that everything will work out for our ultimate good.

When things are tricky and difficult, we often just want to make them stop.

Suffering in life can feel like you're trying to find your way through a maze blindfolded and walking on your hands.

We look for a pattern to try and make some sense of it all and there's nothing there.

We mightn't be able to see the pattern, but we can cling to God's plan, knowing that he works good in all things.

We usually ask why? Why did this happen or why did that happen?

That's not really the wrong question, but God never promises to give us specific answers to those questions.

A much more productive question to ask is, "How"?

Even when I can't see it, life isn't just random.

The events of 2020 popped up unannounced, but they didn't just appear unexpected by God.

This verse means that I can have the expectation that God will use even terrible situations for good.

I can ask him for the eyes to see it.

One of the best examples in the Bible is the way that Joseph was taken down into Egypt.

He was sold as a slave and taken to a foreign land.

Thrown into prison after being wrongly accused of a serious crime, he was left to rot.

And yet God used that event to save his people.

He used Joseph as the means of getting his people to safety from the famine.

Joseph reflects on what his brothers did by saying:

Genesis 50:20 NIV11 ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

God often uses hardship to grow us from what we are to what we'll be.

Anyone who's been a Christian for a while will probably tell you that the times they grew the most were also some of the hardest times.

God may well use trials in these areas to produce what he considers a much higher good: a stronger faith and a more certain hope.

General Stonewall Jackson was a famous leader in the American Civil War.

He lost his arm in battle.

To make matters worse, he was wounded by his own men.

In the days after, he was rejoicing in God.

He told another officer:

You may think it strange; but you never saw me more perfectly contented than I am today; for I am sure that my Heavenly Father designs this affliction for my good. I am perfectly satisfied that, either in this life, or in that which is to come, I shall discover that what is now regarded as a calamity is a blessing. And if it appears a great calamity, (as it surely will be a great inconvenience, to be deprived of my arm,) it will result in a great blessing. I can wait, until God, in his own time, shall make known to me the object he has in thus afflicting me.

That's the conviction of a man who knows that God is working all things together for good.

Knowing that God works ALL things for good gives us courage to keep pressing on today.

#4 those who love him

This verse isn't just saying that there's a generic, good weather outlook for the world regardless of what they do.

This isn't true of everyone.

God's calling out a specific people to love, serve and glorify him.

Loving God isn't our natural state.

In chapter five of Romans, Paul says that by default we are God's enemies.
Despite what most people think, it's unusual, rather than normal, for us to love God.
A great change has taken place in us for us to love him.

This's one of the few places that the Bible talks about us loving God.

The usual emphasis is on God loving us.

That's because we can't claim any of the credit for loving God.

We love God because we've experienced his love first and have responded to it

1 John 4:19 NIV11 ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us.

Loving God is an ongoing thing, but it's also more than what you do for him.

Loving God doesn't just mean getting a bit of paper.

It's more than getting splashed with or dunked under some water.

Loving God's also more than just believing that there is a nice guy up in the sky.

Someone could say that they love God when all they mean is that they believe in the idea of God, that there's probably some force out there, some higher spiritual force.

That's not love.

Loving isn't just believing in him for what he can do for you either.

Yes, I love you God because you'll give me eternal life.

I want to be kept out of hell, so I'll try to do enough to keep in your good books.

God isn't just meant to be put on the shelf or in the corner of a dark cupboard.

He's not just ready to be brought out and dusted off when you need him.

Do you love God?

For who he is.

For no other reason than that you love God – his beauty, his glory, his holiness.

Do you love him for his gentleness and mercy even when every other good give is stripped away?

Do you love God?

This gives us assurance.

#5 called according to his purpose

This last truth is really an explanation of the one before.

Those who love God are those who are called according to his purpose.

We are called by God.

If you look down to verse 30, you'll see that if you've been called, you've also been predestined.

Before the foundation of the world, "God chose us to love."

"Before time eternal," he chose us to be his, not on the basis of our works, but on the basis of his own purpose and grace.²

Ephesians 1:11 NIV11 ¹¹ In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,

From before time began, God had a plan.

It was a plan to save people.

That's tricky for us to get our heads around, isn't it?

Before we were even made or created, long before Adam and Eve sinned, God planned out how he'd rescue us.

His plan was always to do this through Jesus.

1 Peter 1:19–21 NIV11 ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹ Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

What's God's purpose?

To redeem us and also to make us into the image and likeness of his son.

He wants us to be like Jesus.

Verse 29:

Romans 8:29 NIV11 ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

That's so much better than the puny aspirations that most of us – me included – have for our lives.

I had plans for Boxing Day.

They did NOT include a visit to the Queensland Children's Hospital.

But as I found myself driving there, we talked about this verse.

I wondered "How was God going to use this for good?"

Well, he was growing my character by developing my patience.

Reframing my perspective on what's important.

And amazingly, when I remembered that he was in control and at work, I was filled with the feeling of joy that I hadn't had for weeks.

He was making me more like Jesus.

This gives us meaning.

Conclusion

We didn't know what last year was going to bring and that was probably a good thing.

I think all of us are keen to leave the events of 2020 behind.

There are lots of things which happened last year that you might sooner forget.

And yet, what was God doing? It wasn't a mistake.

It's worth reflecting on how God has used this year to bring good.

Who knows what the year ahead will bring?

We don't know the details and so there a part of us that might be worried about what the year ahead will bring.

Sickness, restrictions, persecution, change.

We don't know, but there are some things that we can be certain about.

We can still have confident hope because of what we do know.

Five truths that give us assurance for the year ahead.

Romans 8:28 NIV11 ²⁸ 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.

¹ Exodus 34:6-7

² 2 Timothy 1:9

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Big Question: How do we make plans for 2021?

Big Idea: We know that God uses all things for his purposes.

Discussion Questions

1. How do you like to make plans? Where does God fit into your decision making?
2. What are some ways that God works in the world?
3. How does God's "good" look different from ours?
4. What are some ways that you've seen God use trials and tribulations to bring about good?
5. Does God bring good out of EVERY bad situation?
6. Why is promise only for those who love him?
7. What is the purpose that God has called us to?