

Romans: God Is For Us...

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Date: 22 June 2014

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if you are new here, I met probably eight visitors today, and we'd like to welcome you to Watermark Community Church.

My name is Tobin. I'm one of the pastors here, and we have been going through the Book of Romans. So you've stepped into something, and you're going to walk away going, what the heck is going on there?

And you've seen by the kids and everything else that we are a community church, and things are raw and out of control sometimes. I was told not to use the word raw, I still use the word organic. So we're very organic in everything we do here.

But we're going through the Book of Romans, and if you're here, you came in this passage today. I think that we're going to be looking at probably one of the most precious promises that God has given to His people in all the Bible.

It might be, I think, maybe one of the promises that more people in the world cling to more than any other promise. And you saw it read for you. It was in Romans 8, 28.

[1 : 0 8] Can you read that with me? Let's look at that one more time. And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are according to His purposes.

That was terrible. Let's try it one more time, okay? Let's try it together, okay, okay. Okay. And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Good. You know, I think some of us, we might read this, and we might say, wow, that is, that's right on. That's great. Amen. I believe in that. I live by that. That's great. But I think there's some of us here who might be saying things like, you know, that sounds good.

But functionally, I don't know if that's how I can live my life. I mean, maybe I live my life differently. Maybe I need to say something like, and we know that wealth causes all things to work together for good to those who love wealth.

And those who are called according to wealth's purposes. Maybe we need to say something like, we know that comfort causes all things to work together for good to those who love comfort.

[2 : 2 3] And those who are called according to comfort's purposes. Maybe we need to add in there, family. Family. We know that family causes all things to work together for good to those who love family.

And those who are called according to family's purposes. and you can add a ton of other things you know one of the things I think that I probably add in there more often than not is Tobin you don't add Tobin because you're not Tobin you can add whoever you are but I add Tobin and I say things like you know we know that Tobin causes all things to work together for good to those who love Tobin and to those who are called according to Tobin's purposes you know we look at this promise here and if we're honest with this promise that God gives us we sometimes have a hard time with it we don't know what to do with it we don't know how to handle it and how to live it out and we add things in there and if we're real and if we're honest and if we look at what we do with our hands not what we say with our mouth but often our hands show something different and so the question comes if we add something in there like comfort and we lose our job is the promise true if we lose our health and our God is our family or our job does the promise still hold up as true if we lose a kid or a spouse and we've put in there that we know that God causes or family causes all things to work together does the promise hold up is it true does it last for us does it give us meaning does it help us in the difficult times and I think that for many of us we've never even thought of that because we just hold on to the promise and not thinking about what it means later you know as a young Christian

I was introduced to this promise for the first time in my life and I'm going to share a story I don't know if I've ever shared this story but we can keep it in here because it's a very personal story I was a really young believer and my family had called a family meeting and we usually had family meetings on Friday night when we needed to discuss important family things and so this Friday my mom and dad called a family meeting and so we came into the family house and I remember it as if it was just yesterday even though it was many many many years ago my dad was here my mom was here my two younger sisters were here my golden retriever Travis was here and I was there and so we had this family meeting and in the middle of the family meeting my dad stood up and he said something that I never expected anybody to say in our family or I could never imagine one of my parents saying it and my dad stood up and he said I no longer love your mother and I think it's best that I leave the family I was watching because I didn't know if this was an act or a play or they wanted to see how I was going to react and it was a joke my mom was weeping my sisters were weeping the golden retriever was going crazy because he just knew something was going on so he was just licking everybody he didn't know what to do right and I just sat there kind of going what is going on this cannot be true how could God allow something like this to happen why would God allow something like this to happen remember I was really really young in my faith and I was trying to process this idea of God being loving and God being in control and God being there and in the middle of this scene my family ripped apart and not knowing what to do

I remember I went on this kind of vision quest this journey to try to figure out the why and so I started to ask the people in my world and these were the typical responses I got for my friends who knew me before the pre-Christian days I would say to them the story and their reaction usually was bumme stuff like that happens you want a beer?

that was a typical response to my friends I remember the first Christian I asked it was actually it was a girl that I thought was really cute and I was trying to to date her and trying to get to know her and she went to a different church than I went to and I said to her I shared with her the story and she said to me you know it could be your fault are you praying?

[6 : 58] are you walking with God? I mean God says if you are he's going to bless you and it doesn't look like he's blessing you so you must not be walking with God repent and if you repent and if you confess your sins it's going to be okay and if you pray hard enough God's going to bring your parents back together if you pray hard enough now I don't know which response I like better that my drunk friends or the girl I was trying to date needless to say I never dated her or I kind of walked away after that another of my Christian friends said this he said you know it must be God's will because you're a Christian and everything is God's will and if it's God's will it must be a good thing and everything that happens to God's children is good and so Tobin you just have to find the good in it and if you can find the good in it then you can get your head around it and you're going to understand why God allows those things to happen one of the people who I consider my mentors said this to me actually they just they just listened they listened to me share the story and after that they prayed with me and they said

Toby? now that's what everybody called me before college don't be calling me Toby okay but they said Toby? in a really good southern voice you know God God has a plan for you his hands are on you don't give up God is for you I thought about those responses for a long time how how how would you have answered me?

because I know that there are a lot of us in this room who are going to face things we have faced things like this we are going to face things like this we're going to face things so much harder than this and the question is how do we answer the why?

because we have this promise in God's word which is so beautiful and so amazing and the promise is this is what Andy and Kay said to me God is for you do you believe that?

I mean do you walk every day of your life as you walk through life whatever comes in God is for me God is for me I don't know I have a hard time I struggle with that sometimes getting my head around that in my head I said yes but in my heart in my hands sometimes I don't live it out and so what I want to do is just we're just going to look at maybe one verse or two verses and we're going to come back as we're finishing up Romans 8 and we're going to keep going back through 6, 7 and 8 but I just want to look specifically at what does it mean that God is for us remember we've been going through Romans and we've looked at chapter 6 we've left actually chapter 1 to now but in chapter 6 through 8 what we've said is that Paul has been sharing with all of us what it means to walk the life of a follower of Christ he's talking about what it means to be on a journey with God he's been telling us what it looks like to walk every day and what he keeps telling us is that even after we come to Christ we're walking with God we're deeply deeply covered in God's grace that God pours his grace out upon us over and over as we walk with him remember the passage in Romans says that God is the initiator

[10 : 32] God is the one who acts first and we respond and so Paul is saying in light of all that God has done for us how do we react to the wise I mean in chapter 7 he talked about his internal struggle with sin and this indwelling sin and the things he wants to do that he doesn't want to do and how those things are pulling him down and then chapter 8 he starts talking about these trials and these tribulations and all these hard things that he's going through and he's talking about his journey but what he's really trying to do is he's trying to share for us for our journey because he says on your journey someday this is going to happen on your journey as you walk with God you're going to face the why and you're going to wonder if that promise is true or if it's false and so what I want to do today what I hope to do today what I intend to do today is I want to look at three things in this passage in verse 28 I want to look at how do we know that God's promise is true

I want to know what do we know about God's promise to us and I want to look at how should this affect us today okay so how do we know God's promise is true what do we know about God's promise as we read it out and look at this passage and the rest of scripture and how should we allow this promise to affect us today you ready come on are you ready okay good good thanks Josh you got the loud voice okay so the first thing he says here is how do we know this promise is true because in verses 26 and 27 he's talking about the tribulation and the trials and the hard things happening to his life and Paul says that there are times that you and I don't even know how to pray that there are times when things hit us and they're so difficult that we don't even know how to pray we don't even know what to pray about we don't even know how to pray and he says here that when those times come in our life that God's spirit stands before us the Holy Spirit the third person of Trinity and he actually he teaches us what to pray he shows us what to pray he stands before God and he prays for us and so the spirit is praying even when we don't know what to do but then he gets to verse 28 and he goes for sure

I know for sure this is true confident 100% I know I know I know God is for you God has a plan in your life he's not saying I hope it's true I think it's true probably it's true maybe it's true but what Paul is saying here is 100% sure everything even though it doesn't look like it we know for 100% true that God has a promise for you and that he's for you so the question I have to ask us is do we do we know that do we know that God is for us do we know that he wants his best our best do we know that he loves us I mean we read the Bible we go through the Bible and the Old Testament is full of these stories and there's some amazing stories of here of how we know I mean you read these stories like Daniel and he stood up against his bosses like some of us are going to have to do this week or this month he stood up against his bosses and they actually threw him into this pit of lions where he's going to be devoured and God was for him and stood before him and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego the same oppressive government like HSBC or whatever those things are and they stand up against their employers and they get thrown into this fire and some of you are going to feel like that this week some of us are you going to be put in positions in your work and in your school and in your graduate work and you're going to stand up for God and you're going to be put into a fire and the Old Testament says that God is with you that he's with his people we see stories of Job and David and Jonah and Joseph but most of all what Paul says in this passage is look at the cross how do we know the promise is true look at the cross look at what he says in verses 31 and 32 what then shall we say of these things if God is for us who is against us he who did not spare his own son but delivered him over for all of us how will he not also with him freely give us all things whenever we're called to doubt whenever we're in the fire whenever we're in the lion pen whenever things are difficult whenever things are out of control

God says Paul says in his passage that we know the promise is true that God is for us and if we ever doubt it if we ever wonder about it if we ever think about it look at the cross because God gave his most precious thing for you remember two weeks ago we talked about you know Peter Jackson and when he wants to make the Hobbit movie what was the first thing he had to do well the first thing he had to do is he had to buy the rights to the film before he could make an amazing movie and the Bible says that God bought the rights to your story that God paid the ultimate price for your story and so you should never worry about whether he's good you should never worry about whether he's in control you should never worry about if he's for you because he paid everything for you and surely he is going to write an amazing amazing story in your life do you believe it this is more of a self-confession

I think than a sermon for me because you know sometimes I I say I do but I worry I worry I worry about things they're not right they're not ready they're not in control I worry about those things do I believe it I mean I say I do but sometimes I want to be in control I really like control I want to be in control I mean control is really really important to me do I believe it for me what I've learned is if I worry or if I'm under the stress to be in control I'm probably struggling with the promise that God is good that God is for me that God wants my best because I don't believe that because I want to control maybe you have that problem too the next thing we see in this passage is that what we know about this passage what we know about this amazing promise what we know that when he says that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love him to those who are called according to his purpose and the first thing we know already is that he's he's for us that he's working for us he's doing an amazing thing in our life and the first thing

[17 : 52] I look at here in this verse is well who's us in the us he says is two things you look at it he says the us is for those who love God and those who are called according to his purpose I mean the language it's the same person it's God's children and he's describing us from two different points of view the first one is from our point of view looking up to God we're those who love God the second point of view is God looking down at us and those who are called by him and verses 29 through 30 use these huge words that we've been talking about through Romans you know justification and sanctification and called and basically what he said there is from the beginning of time eternity past remember we talked about time eternity past creation fall redemption restoration eternity future from the beginning of time eternity past God has known you as his child and he has called you to be with him the passage is only for those who are God's people so maybe I should ask the question do we love God because it says that's what's true from those from a human standpoint looking up to God we're those who love God do we love God what does it look like for us to love God what does it mean that we love God the passage and the text goes on and it says

God causes all things there's a very special words there it means all things it means complete whole everything the passage is saying that if you are God's child there's nothing that comes into your life positive or negative there's nothing that's going to happen to you today tomorrow next week there's nothing that God is not in control of in your life I mean another way to say it is this maybe we can say it this way nothing can change God's promise to you nothing can change God's promise to you God is always for you God God always loves you as his child he always has a plan for you the truth doesn't change is God's children so what does that mean big things little things evil stupid things

I do bad choices I make other people's bad choices sin good times hard times failures things outside of me look at verse 38 we read it already as a group for I'm convinced that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor things present nor things come nor powers nor height nor depth nor any other thing created are we created yes we're created so we cannot separate ourselves from God's love we'll be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus everything there's nothing that can separate you if you are God's child from the promise do you believe that is that true in your life is that how you live your life I mean the passage says that God will never allow things in there he's never surprised by things that happen in your life when we sin when we make mistakes God doesn't go oh oh Tobin sinned that's terrible I gotta rewrite everything I gotta do things over again God is in control of everything here's some thoughts and listen carefully because we're gonna have a discussion on this later on we're setting up this kind of foundation for our future look into Romans the Bible does not say that everything that happens to Christians is good he doesn't say that in the passage

I mean there and this is what the person told me after I shared my story remember that now I think about I wonder if they're more Islamic than Christian but they said well God does everything good everything that happens to you is good God is good but the Bible doesn't say that the Bible doesn't say everything that happens to us as Christians is good there are gonna be many things that are just evil in our lives crime war immorality betrayal of spouses and friends abuse injustice gossip selfishness pride anger the Bible never says any of these things are good so don't be going around telling people well you know those things are all gonna be good because God wouldn't allow them in your life once they're good they're not good they're evil they're not from God the passage also has to make us redefine what good is doesn't it because if I were to ask the question before we started what does it mean to be good for me

I would say things like well it's easy convenient comfortable no stress never lose a job lots of money never have kid problems my kids get into Harvard live on a peak my car never breaks down my credit cards never get stolen all these things have been happening to me this week which has been amazing it's interesting when you preach a passage God just kind of puts stuff at you and says okay let's see how you do this what do you think about this and all these things and you learn from those things not my kids got into Harvard that didn't happen but the other things happen so but you know what he's saying here is that all these things God is he says that's not how God sees his good what God calls his good is things that make us more like Jesus what God calls his good is experiences and things that prepare us for a real home heaven I think sometimes I get confused because sometimes I think eternity past creation fall redemption restoration eternity present sometimes I get caught in this thought and I just think right here is our home and sometimes I forget that our home is actually heaven you you weren't made to live on earth forever right your home is heaven with God one of the things

[24 : 24] I struggled with in this whole process of reading the passage and thinking about it and what things I've been learning through God's word is sometimes we give information like well you know your girlfriend dumped you but you're going to get a better one you know your boyfriend dumped you but you're going to get a better one you know you lost that job but God's going to give you a better one you know God has a plan for you he's going to give you the best one he's going to give you something so much better than what you had before but you know the scripture never says that the Bible never says that you're going to see the good come after things happen I mean it's amazing that we get to see it and I think it's part of God's grace in our life and his encouragement but we might lose things here on earth and we might not ever see them again until we get to heaven I mean just because we lose this amazing job doesn't mean that God has another amazing job for you maybe God realizes that this amazing job is destroying you is killing your family and you're spending more time at work and studying and all these other things than you are with the people of God that God's put you into your life to shepherd and so God's taking that job away because he knows that you're destroying yourself and you're destroying the people you love maybe you're never going to see that job again but what the passage says is that we know is that God is taking all of those things and he's doing something amazing in them he's doing this amazing thing in our life he's making us more like Christ so that when we walk on this earth we reflect the image of Christ he's making us more like Christ so that we're like this mirror and we reflect God's image to all of creation he's making us more like Christ so that when we get to heaven we will see him and we will be like him that's what good means in God's terminology

I know I'm going to bother some of you when I say this one and I've kind of prayed about whether I should do this but you know the passage never says and the Bible never says that God only works for you if you're his child if you're doing good remember my friend told me that the first girl I wanted to date who was really cute blonde she said the reason those things aren't happening is because you're not being good enough you're not praying enough you're not studying enough you're not doing all the things God wants you maybe you're disobeying him but you know the Bible never ever says that and this is the amazing thing about grace the Bible says if you are God's child and you're walking and you're making mistakes that God is taking all those things and he's doing something amazing in your life and he's the first guy who disciplined me basically said this Tobin you have 100% and every time you sin you get less than 100% and so you got to be careful because when you get down to the 50-40 range God's not going to be able to use you that's not what scripture says but I know there's a lot of us in here who believe that there's a lot of us in here who believe because I messed up because I did this thing wrong

God can never use me there's a lot of us here who walk around with incredible amount of guilt and shame and just fear in our life and we're afraid of doing the wrong thing because we're worried that we're going to get below that 50% and if we get below that 50% God's never going to be able to use us it's something interesting in us isn't it that we come to church and we say oh yeah God yeah we come to faith by God by grace it's all Jesus Christ nothing to do with me but then after we walk out that door it's me me me me me me I got to do I got to be I got to do these things if I do these things I'll get them all right and God will have favor on me and everything's great but what the passage says is that God's grace and mercy are poured out upon us so even when we're not doing well even when we make bad mistakes he never forsakes you he never gives up on you he never stops his plan for you he never stops the good that he wants to do in your life the scripture says that God if you're his child he's always working he's always building he's always doing an amazing thing you know I don't understand it

I used to think I was kind of smart until I started reading the Bible and then I'm like oh you know you have God and his sovereignty and you have my free will and now how do I these things work together I don't know because if I make a choice do I mess up God maybe not maybe God just doing all these things I'm just a robot and the scripture says that somehow in God's infinite wisdom you and I can't understand it because if we could we were God but what the Bible says is somehow and he's working him out for our good he has a plan for you he never gives up on you I don't understand it because I've failed so many times but the passage says we can know that God is always for you he's always at work in your lives he's always doing a good thing the future is assured God never wastes anything even when evil or bad things come in your life he's taking all those things he's working them together and he's changing you and making you into something amazing

I don't know how to explain it we had three birthdays this week I mean we had ten little girls sleeping over at our house last night I was like thinking what the heck am I doing I gotta get up I gotta it's like herding cats right I had five little seven year olds and I had five little eleven year olds I don't know which ones are worse but you're just trying to okay guys let's go get these things get these things and I was thinking what the heck are we doing but the reason I'm sharing this is because Christina made a lot of cakes and what I realized as I watched her making cakes is our life is kind of like cakes and God's pouring these ingredients in there right I mean there's one time Christina made a cake and she put salt in it instead of sugar right and we had company over I think Jay was with us and we ate this and we said hey so try this cake what do you think and I ate it and I'm like and then she asked you the question all husbands hate right how's it taste it's kind of like does this dress make me look fat you know and you're like

[31 : 00] I'm like it's not too good what something's wrong and she tasted oh man I put salt instead of sugar in it oh we'll have to mix another one but I think our lives are kind of like that right that God takes the salt and the pain and the hurt and our mistakes and other people's mistakes and he takes mercy and grace and blessings and he mixes all those things together and he makes something amazing does that make sense I got it's kind of like those new watches you know I don't have a watch that new one my wife you know we have this rule every 10 years I can get a new watch but those new watches you know those new watches that have the open back on them life is kind of like that you look at that back and when you look at that it looks crazy there's some wheels going this way and some wheels going that way and some wheels going counter ways and some wheels are big and some wheels are small and some wheels are gold and some wheels are bronze and there's little but it doesn't make any sense when you look at it you can't when you're looking at the back of the watch you have no idea what's going on but when you turn around you see time and the passage says that's kind of like our lives and the thing we need to know is at the end of it with all these things happening

God is doing something amazing he's changing us he's making us more like his son and we can trust him we can trust him so how should we live in regards to this truth and this knowledge that it's true and it's real and we have choices well for me this passage just keeps reminding me of God's mercy and God's grace it reminds me that God is in control that he causes all things to work together that word is synergy it means that the sum is less than I mean the total is less than the parts that all these things are happening and at the end he's going to do something amazing through all these experiences in our life the passage reminds me that in the deepest pit in the darkest hour when I feel like I've blown it the most when I feel like no one is for me have you ever felt that way

I feel that way no one's for me I've really blown it this time what am I going to do the passage says when we feel that way God is there and he's working and he's moving and he's changing and he's making us something amazing to you you know many of you have already why am I saying that many have already left for vacation so you're not even hearing this many of you are visiting many of us are going to leave for vacation many of us are going to miss airplanes many of us are going to miss lose things many of us are going to have things stolen bad things happen many of us are going to get do's that we don't like to hear many of us are going to get health issues many of us are going to face crazy in-laws. I love you, honey. Many of us are going to experience divorced parents.

Many of us are going to experience poor choices, missed desires, missed expectations. But Romans tells us that in the midst of all of that, God is working and he's changing us.

And he's for us. And that he loves us. And we can trust him because he's good.

[35 : 10] No matter what happens. No matter what we do. No matter what we face. When I was, what I meant to do when you came in here, put a little card on your table, on your chair.

What I was going to ask you to do, the first thing was I was going to ask you to write on the back of it, what is the worst experience you've ever had? Hopefully it's not sitting in a sermon. And on the front, what I wanted you to write is, God is for Mike, or Tobin, or Christina, or Jesse, or David, or John Paul, or Simon, or Jay, or Bernard, whatever your name is.

I'd love for you to carry this around. This is my gift for you for the summer. I'd love for you to carry it around your wallet. Whenever things get hard, whenever things get difficult, whenever things don't go your way, whenever you wonder, I've blown it so badly right now, God cannot be for me.

I want you to pull this out. If you're like me, you're going to be pulling it out every week. Maybe every day. And realize that God is for you.

Because he gave his son. And you can trust him. And you can trust him. How are we doing?

[37 : 00] I don't know why God does the things he does. For 30 years, I've been trying to figure out why my parents got divorced.

But I don't know. I'm 51 years old. You know, I'm 51 years old, and my parents' divorce 40 years ago still affects me. Is that crazy?

Is that crazy? To see how sin, and it wasn't my fault, comes in and affects us? I don't know why.

I look back now, and I think, well, maybe one of the reasons is, is I'm here. Because I'm pretty sure that if my parents were still together, I'd be a doctor in America.

Or a flight surgeon on an aircraft carrier flying fighter jets. Now, is that the whole reason it happened? I don't know. But looking at just a small glimpse of time now, I realize that God is taking something terrible.

[38 : 10] And in his children's lives, making something amazing. God is for you. He loves you.

He cares for you. There's nothing that ever can separate you from his love and his relationship. He sent a son to die on the cross. May we be a church that holds tightly to that.

When the doubt and the shame and the guilt and the heartache and the death comes, you know. You have a Savior.

He died on the cross. So that we can come back to God. Father, we thank you for this day. We thank you for your mercy and your grace in our life.

We thank you that you are awesome. We thank you for your word that is living and active and way beyond our understanding in so many ways as you live out and work out your will.

[39 : 18] Lord, I pray for those in our church family right now. I know that there are some of us here. When they read that passage, they put in things like money works out all good things.

And I pray for them. I pray for them. I pray for them. I pray that you would open their eyes to your son, Jesus.

pray that they would see that the things that they cling to will ultimately fail them and there's only one thing that we can cling to that will not fail us and it's your son Jesus Christ pray that they would ask questions of the people that came with church today and that those people would share with them the gospel and grace Father I pray for the rest of us in here who struggle as your children we become so easily distracted by the world around us by our desires and we grab onto control and we have fear and we have doubt and we have shame and we worry I know you're looking at us going guys chill out I'm in control I'm working through all these things you can trust me

I gave you my son there's nothing else I can give you I'm not going to ruin your life script and story there's something amazing coming because one day we're going to be home Father pray for us pray that if the rest of us are like me that we need people in our lives to continually, continually, continually share these things to us over and over and encourage us and ask us and exhort us and convict us when we've lost our way and we've lost our focus Father we thank you that you are the God of second chances and that your word as we read today says that you never give up on your children and what I pray for this church here we know that you put us here in this part of Hong Kong on this island on this western part to not just come and be a club for ourselves but you brought us here so that we could reach out to the people who do not yet know your son the people who are clinging to other things for significance and security and hope and they have other promises that they hold on to

Lord help us to remember what it was like when we held on to a promise that wasn't real
give us the courage to love those around us to speak to our neighbors and to our
classmates and to our colleagues and to our bosses all the while realizing that you're
there and you're doing an amazing thing no matter what comes into our life and we can
trust you because you're good because you're good Father we love you we pray these
things in your son Jesus name Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen