If you think about it, I’m not sure which position is most difficult to be in, an individual enduring a horrific trial or the friends and family who attempt to encourage that person. I learned a long time ago or heard this statement made and I truly believe it’s true, that encouragement must be encouraging! That’s kind of a pretty simple principle, but I think it’s a true principle. If you’re encouraging someone but it’s not encouraging, then obviously that’s a problem. Consider this story hypothetical, although I believe it’s probably played out a number of times over the years.

Mary just lost her husband due to a long illness. Her husband was only forty-nine. Her friend Susan comes over and says, “Mary I know this has been a hard time for you but cheer up, all this is for the good. Listen to Romans 8 verse 28: And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. Everything will work out ok.” But Mary responds, “Susan, do you know how much pain he suffered? Do you know how the last three months he laid there and all the suffering he went through? Do you know that every penny we had saved was spent on medical care and I’m left with a huge debt? Do you know the hole that’s left in my heart after my husband has been ripped from me? What do you mean all things work together for good?” What would you say if you were Susan? Did she say something wrong? Did she misuse the verse?

Does God promise Christians that only good will result from any action in their lives? That’s a question I’d like to pursue this afternoon. It is very difficult, but I believe there are numerous misconceptions about trial, tragedy and Christians. One would have to be blind to believe that a Christian will never suffer tragedy or difficulty. Every time someone is sick is he healed? Is it true that no one close to us ever dies and that everyone enjoys financial success and prosperity, because after all, all things work together for good? How do we understand this simple verse from the apostle Paul? This was also the concluding song at the conference in Louisville. We sang this song and, as I said, there were many misty eyes as it was sung, All Things Work Together for Good.

I’d like to relate two very different stories to you this afternoon, these are true stories; they’re not hypothetical. They’re stories that I experienced over years in my ministry. Stories that I think illustrate the point very clearly. That often there are two ditches when it comes to this particular verse. One is that means that everything that happens in my life must be good or else I’m the problem. I’ve done something wrong. Or the other one says, that well, nothing good will ever happen; this verse is really incorrect. Or that bad things will happen to me and this verse just simply isn’t right. God’s promises aren’t secure.

This is a story that happened a number of years ago when I was fairly new to the ministry. This is when I was serving in Atlanta, Georgia. At that time I was an elder serving in Atlanta, working for the pastors of the two churches in Atlanta. One morning I received a phone call from a man who was obviously in the grip of deep sadness; a type of sadness that you can feel on
the other end of the phone line. He was in Atlanta, Emory University Hospital with his daughter. He’d gotten hold of me through the *Plain Truth* magazine. He was not a church member, had never attended a service, but he was a subscriber and we were at a last hope for him. He asked me to come to Emory and anoint his daughter. She was ten years old. This was 1974. She had been diagnosed with a life-threatening brain tumor. She was from Little Rock, Arkansas, but no one in Little Rock would or could operate on her, so she was in Atlanta for further evaluation. I traveled to Emory that very afternoon, walked into the hospital not knowing whom I’m looking for, finally met the gentleman who was weeping over his daughter; a bewildered frightened little girl, a ten year old little girl. I remember very clearly her dark hair and her dark eyes. I anointed her on that day and left, of course spent some time with them (they had no connection with the church outside of having read a Plain Truth Magazine), anointed her for the brain tumor and left. Two days later I received a phone call from the father. He was crying uncontrollably and told me the doctors had examined his daughter and just informed him the tumor had gone, disappeared. She had no tumor at all. He asked them what happened? And they simply told him that they didn’t know. It had just disappeared. That was many years ago now, thirty-six years ago when that happened. It’s a remarkable story to me to anoint someone and two days later to find out a miracle had occurred. Over the years you treasure those stories because you see it doesn’t always happen that way.

Another story, maybe expresses sort of the opposite side of this particular perspective or this particular view. Second story would be the other ditch, illustrated by a gentleman in New England. His name was Bill. Bill was a dedicated church member but he had lived a riotous life far from God until he was in his early thirties, but now he was a dedicated member completely committed to serving God and helping people. He helped many people in the Boston congregation in the late seventies and early eighties. In the winter of 1983 he couldn’t shake a cough. It was a cough that just plagued him for about six months. He was anointed on several occasions. Finally he sought medical advice and it was recommended that he have a biopsy of his lung. There was something going on there that they couldn’t figure out. I spoke to Bill the night before the operation, anointed him before the operation; it was to be a simple procedure, everything seemed ok. The next afternoon I received a frantic call from Paula who was a member in Chelmsford, Massachusetts who had gone to the hospital to be with Bill. During the biopsy the doctors discovered that Bill’s lungs were completely overwhelmed by a virus that was eating away at the lining of his lungs. They first called it an infection. He was now on life-support. I rushed to the hospital to see Bill. Paula met me there. It was a very dire situation. Bill was being prepared for transportation to Massachusetts General Hospital. They could do nothing for him in the small regional hospital. He was conscious but on life-support. I went in to anoint him again. I looked into his eyes and saw the greatest fear that I’ve ever seen in a man’s face. He was finally diagnosed as having ARDS, Acute Respiratory Disease Syndrome. It was described as being similar to Legionnaire’s Disease and that his lungs were being eaten away and that now they were like Swiss cheese. The only thing keeping Bill alive was the machine that breathed for him. Bill lived for about three months; his condition never improved and he died.

The second ditch is that we question whether God ever fulfills his promise. On one occasion it’s as though God always intervenes. We expect that. We expect that God will always heal us when we are sick. The other is that we begin to wonder, “Does God mean what he said? Is Romans...
8:28 a real, viable promise from God, or is there something else going on in this particular verse?” We seem to often fall into two groups. God does fulfill his promises, and if something goes wrong it has to be my fault, or we’re not sure God really means what He says when He tells us He will do something. Which is it, brethren? What is Romans 8:28 really telling us? Let’s go to Romans 8 verse 28. This verse has been called the most important scripture in the Bible. As I mentioned, the final song in the Louisville Conference was based on Romans 8:28. All things work together for the good, it was an emotional moment and there were hardly any dry eyes in the audience as we stood and sang together because of the recent trial that we’ve gone through in the church and wondering, ‘What is God telling us? What does God want us to do? How can this ever be good? How can it ever be good? How can families be separated? How can some of the animosity that’s occurred, how can all of that ever be good? What does God have in store for us? What is God trying to tell us?’ Romans 8:28 is one of the most often quoted scriptures in the Bible and yet, probably one that is misunderstood by so many, many people; possibly even by some of us, as to what God is really telling us. I found it interesting if you look at various translations; in the New Kings James it says this:

**Romans 8:28** … we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

We know that all things work together for the good. The NIV has a little different twist on this verse, not that I promote the NIV, but it does have a little different approach:

**Romans 8:28** 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.

Now that’s a little different twist. In fact a footnote in the NIV says that there are two possible translations of this verse. The difficulty is that the translators aren’t quite sure what the subject is. Is the subject “all things” or is the subject “God”? The words, “all things work together” or “God works in all things”? Well you may say, “Well, that’s not a very big difference.” Well, in reality it is a very big difference because we’re going to come back to the same desire to understand this verse as we go through it this afternoon.

The word “work” comes from a Greek word *sunergei* which is from where we get the word *synergy* and it has to do with working together. It has to do with a combination of being a co-worker, something of that effect. So it’s all things work together, or God works together, implying that you and I, He’s working with us, so that ALL things, all things produce a positive outcome. The end result isn’t all that major, isn’t all that majorly different, but there is a slight difference there. Is it God working with you to make things ok, or is it all things will be ok because God is present? I want to pursue that here this afternoon.

Has God made promises that failed? Has God made promises that failed? Let’s go to Romans chapter 4, verse 21. This is the story of Abraham. Abraham never doubted God. But was everything good in Abraham’s life? Did everything happen exactly the way Abraham wanted it to occur? We would all say, “Well, that’s not true.” Abraham lost his wife Sarah. She died. He remarried, had a number of other children. Was there never any tragedy in Abraham’s life? Look at Romans 4 verse 21, beginning in verse 20.
Romans 4:20-21 He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform (fully convinced that what He promised He was able to perform. GOD DOES DO WHAT HE SAYS!)

That’s a profound principle of truth that we must be able to understand. We must be able to understand. But how does that affect things that happen to us; trials, difficulties or tragedies? Look at Hebrews Chapter 6, verse 18; Hebrews Chapter 6 and verse 18. This is a wonderfully encouraging verse because it explains to us what God cannot do. You say, “Well, God can do everything.” What is it that God will not do? Hebrews 6, verse 18.

Hebrews 6:18 that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, (It is impossible for God to lie!)

We certainly know that that isn’t true for human beings. It is impossible, though, for God to lie. If God says something, if God describes something, if God promises something, IT IS TRUE! How does that work in our day-to-day lives? How does that work? How does that occur? How can we say that God never lies, that everything He says and everything He promises is true? How can that be when our life experience says that there are bad things that happen? There are things that occur; there are tragedies that occur; there are trials that occur; there are things that you just cannot figure out. I’ve been asked any number of times over the last several months as to what happened, what went wrong previously? I’ve explained to people, because it’s my honest feeling, that things happened that did not have to occur. Things happened that did not have to occur. There were ways that could have been dealt with, but wasn’t dealt with, that produced the end result of where we are today. Now, we can sit down and try to figure all of those things out, which again some have, or we can simply acknowledge and accept the fact that a tragedy did occur, wasn’t a good thing, wasn’t a positive thing; and that now we have to see where God will take us and what God will do with us. You see, God also promises that if we are humble, if we come before Him seeking his guidance and help, we seek to obey Him with all our hearts, we cry out to Him, that God WILL be a part of what we do and that God will lead us and guide us and direct us, because He DOES NOT LIE. He does not lie. And maybe God is looking for something from us. Maybe God wants something from us that we have failed to recognize over the past months or years. Just maybe God wants us to do something that maybe we haven’t done before, individually and maybe collectively, because, you see, we’re all capable of falling short and we do on a regular basis. Titus 1, verse 2. In instructions to Titus and to Timothy as far as the church is concerned, look what Paul says:

Titus 1:1-2 Paul, a bondservant of God (verse 1) and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness,

Verse 2: in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began, (The hope of eternal life is a promise and God cannot lie.)

We begin to see that God’s ultimate purpose and goal is to see us in His kingdom. God’s ultimate purpose and goal is to make us His children in the world tomorrow; His children for all
eternity. Spirit beings who serve and work and live for all eternity because God cannot lie, because God has promised to give us these things that are far beyond anything in this human existence.

F.B. Meyer in a book that he wrote a number of years ago addressed the issue, can God’s promises fail? I thought he addressed it in a rather graphic and an interesting way because I think it explains it quite clearly.

“If any promise of God should fail, the heavens would clothe themselves in sackcloth. The sun, the moon and the stars would reel from their courses. The universe would rock, and a hollow wind would moan through a ruined creation the awful fact that God can lie.”

In other words, if God can lie, everything falls apart. There is no future. There is no hope. There is not even a present if God can lie. Because if God can lie there is no future, there is no family of God, there is no eternal life, there is nothing out there; and what do we have without God? It is a fundamental belief that we must as Christians, we must believe as Christians that God cannot lie. Whatever He promises, He will fulfill. This is fundamental to who we are. This determines where we go, what we do and how we react. God cannot lie.

Prophecy proves that God cannot lie. No prophecy has ever failed. Jesus Christ is also proof that God will not lie. His life can be confirmed historically as well as biblically. He is the Son of God. He was God in the flesh and He walked this earth. God cannot lie.

Well, if that’s an established fact, then what does Romans 8:28 say? Let’s go back to Romans 8:28. First of all, let’s decide what Romans 8:28 does NOT say. It does not say you will never experience bad in your life. It does not say you will never experience bad in your life. It does not say that you will only experience good in your life. It does not say that. If it did then we have multiple contradictions in the Bible. The Bible describes the life of a Christian in great detail. We also have examples to look to for learning. What do they tell us? What does God tell us? What does He say? Romans chapter 8 actually has some interesting things. We’re going to come back and go through this chapter verse by verse but take a look at this first of all; Look at Romans 8, let’s go to verse 35. Romans 8, verse 35. Let’s establish the fact that Romans 8:28 is not telling us that nothing bad will happen in your life and that only good. It doesn’t say that only good will happen to you. It doesn’t say that.

Romans 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? (and notice this) Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

Well, what does that say? It simply means that a Christian can experience all of these. Tribulations, persecution, distress, famine, nakedness, peril or sword; now that goes a bit contrary to what’s called the health-wealth gospel. That is the message that if you obey God, everything will be ok. There will never be a problem ahead. That creates huge issues if we take that approach. That is the approach taken by a number of people today; in essence people like Joel Osteen are sort of categorized the health-wealth gospel. That is if you feel good, you think good; you act good, then everything will be good. Where does the distress, where does the tribulation, where does the persecution, where does the famine, where does all of this come in if
you can control that by thinking good thoughts, acting with good behavior and just being a good person that only good will happen in life. There are those who have bought into various philosophies and that have been even taught in recent years, but they’ve been around for a long time, that you can think your way into good things. You can think your way into good things. Now there is a scripture that talks about, “As a man thinketh in his heart, so shall it be.” There is certainly nothing wrong with advocating positive thinking. Will that prevent bad things from happening? Look at what’s happened, and I reference the fact that a tragedy has occurred in the church. It’s a tragedy, brethren. It is tragic. Why? Why did it happen? What does God say for the future? Where are we going and what does this mean?

Look at 2 Corinthians chapter 1. Look at a few verses about trials and difficulties for Christians. It is in error to think that the Bible holds out the fact that there will be no trials in your life. I think you know that that’s not true. 2 Corinthians 1 and verse 3.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4  Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

It is a fact, brethren that people who have endured trials are often able to help others who are now going through a similar trial. It’s just a fact. I learned that a number of years ago; I’ve known it all my life, but sometimes it was difficult being a young minister. When you’re starting out as a minister, you’re a pastor; you’re twenty-three, twenty-four years of age and being able to relate to serious life trials that people are experiencing that you’ve never experienced. And I have to acknowledge it wasn’t easy. It was difficult to know and understand that.

I remember a few years back in 1998 my father died. My father and I spent, obviously grew up in a home, a loving home. My father was very much involved with some of my athletics; the athletics that I participated in. He was always at sports games and things of that nature, and was a good father. As I grew up, I went to college, I was off, and we lived in different parts of the country. We didn’t have nearly as much contact as probably we would have wanted. And then he developed a heart condition and died at the age of sixty-nine, and it was difficult; and yet I had been at that time a minister for so many years, I’d been to many, many funerals. I once kept track of the number of funerals and the number of weddings I’d done; and in the twenty years we spent in Houston, I performed almost exactly the same, a hundred funerals and a hundred weddings in that twenty year period of time. So, you’ve seen a lot, you’ve experienced a lot; then your father dies and you go and experience that. It was really shocking to me that when I came back from the funeral and announced to the congregation my father died, it was very hard to say those words. I mean I found it so very difficult to say it. And that really surprised me. I thought that well, I’ve been around death, I’ve seen families go through this, I’ve helped them, I’ve been strong for them; I’ve stood beside them; and now this has happened to me and to be able to say that, just to say the words was a struggle for me. And I realized the depth of hurt when someone that close does die.

But you know what happened after that? Whenever I heard of someone in the ministry who, you know, these are grown men or grown women, these are not teenagers or children and you think,
well they can handle this. Death is part of life. I’ve made it a habit as much as I can over the
years of sending a note to those who lost a parent, even though they were adults, because it
doesn’t change the hurt whether you are sixty or whether you’re twenty. The hurt at losing
someone is truly there. I learned a lesson and did this to a minister who was even older than I
was and his father died, and I wrote him a note and he wrote back this long message to me, and
he says how thankful he was that I wrote something to him because even though he was himself
in his sixties and his father who was near ninety had died, he said it meant so much that someone
understood what it felt like. When you think of the fact of comforting others, trials and
tribulations add to your ability, add to your ability, to be able to give comfort to others and that’s
what Paul is saying to the Corinthians.

Look at James, chapter 1; very familiar verses here, James chapter 1. When you talk about what
we go through as Christians. James chapter 1, beginning in verse 2, he says:

James 1:2  
My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, (If there’s a difficult
verse in the Bible, this one has to be right up there. It’s one of the more difficult ones.) count it
all joy when you fall into various trials,

I have to acknowledge to you that the last few months have not been real joyful. That was why
being in Louisville was just such a relief; again the verse in Psalm 3 which talks about a relief.
What a relief it was to be around people and to laugh and to talk and to enjoy company again.
I’ve been used to, over the years in the ministry, having a real brotherhood within the ministry.
Having the ability to laugh and talk and enjoy company of people that you’ve known for thirty-
five plus years. That had disappeared a few months ago. To find that it was back was just
overwhelming. It was such a wonderful atmosphere to be present there. It was such a wonderful
feeling to be able to have a meal with the Rhodes again and have Mr. Rhodes tell us stories
again. It’s a wonderful feeling. It meant so much, I think, to everyone to be there, to have that
feeling as much as anything we did during the conference because it said, you know, this is a
trial we’ve gone through. There is a joy now as we look forward to the future and, you begin to
understand count it all joy, count it all joy. In spite of it all, there is life, there is joy, there is a
future.)

James 1:3-4  
knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its
perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

The lesson of patience is one that we all have to learn. It is very, very difficult to learn patience.
It’s very difficult to watch people endure long periods of time of trials and difficulties. I’ve
known of individuals who’ve had employment issues and they’ve gone weeks and months and
years sometimes with a trial, a difficult trial or health issues that drag on for weeks and months
and years. Patience is an extremely important quality for a Christian. We’re, as we’ve said it
before, this is a marathon; it’s not a sprint. We’ve seen some difficult times. We’ve seen fifteen
years ago someone made the connection, I don’t believe this is true, but they made the
connection that they discovered why the church has had problems. Every time we print a
hymnal there’s a split in the church; so if we just quit printing hymnals, everything will be ok
from now on. I hadn’t quite made that connection before but if that’s true, if that’ll solve the
problem, I’ll tell you, I’ll NEVER be a part of printing another hymnal! It isn’t that way though,
is it? It isn’t quite that simple to be able to resolve. But patience is an extremely important quality for all of us as Christians. We don’t know how long a trial will last. We have to be patient and we have to trust God.

1 Peter, chapter 4, verse 12:

**1 Peter 4:12-13** Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

Often the joy from a trial comes when it’s over and you realize the end result has been positive in your life to some degree. But we must partake of Christ’s suffering if we want to be a part of His glory, if we want to share in that glory, and it says:

**1 Peter 4:13** …you may be glad also with exceeding joy (with exceeding joy).

Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 32. Look at all the bad things that have happened to people over the years; people that are listed as faithful individuals.

**Hebrews 11:32-38** And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, (You notice it lists all these individuals and all of the things that happened and all of the great miracles that occurred and then it says “and others were tortured.” I don’t think torture is a good thing. I think that’s one of the bad things that could happen to you.) not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

**Verses 36-37:** Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—

This is the statement that I really want you to focus on:

**Verse 38:** of whom the world was not worthy. (They did not deserve these things to occur to them.) They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves.

These are the people of God down through the years. If we believe that because we’re living in a modern age where things are so different, we have all the conveniences, we have all the wealth and the prosperity of this country that you and I can escape this life without enduring hardship, we are wrong. I had a minister tell me one time and I’ve not necessarily tested his theory but he said at some point in everyone’s life you will find a trial that will be so overwhelming that you feel you cannot endure it. Everyone will have such a trial. A life-threatening trial, a trial where someone close to you, in some way a trial will occur that will push you to the very limit. It will be all you can endure at some point in your life. I’ve not proven that, I’ve not questioned
everyone and asked them, “Have you had such a trial in your life?” But experience tells me that’s probably true. That every single one of us from the time of our birth till the time of our death will face such a life-threatening trial. Not necessarily threatening our lives physically, but something that is so overwhelmingly sad, something that is so overwhelmingly difficult, that it becomes a struggle to get up in the morning.

I’ve told a story of, I’ve kept over the years a co-worker letter from Mr. Armstrong written in 1946. Mr. Armstrong was very graphic in some of his writings. He wrote with all the capital letters and would evoke a great deal of emotion in just what he wrote. This letter was in particular the founding of Ambassador College in 1946. Mr. Armstrong wrote, “These are the darkest days of my life.” He says, “Every night when I go to bed I pray to God that I won’t wake up tomorrow morning.” He said, “It’s just that bad; it’s overwhelming. It’s like this huge pressure on my chest.” Because of all the things that were going on and all the efforts to try to get this started. He really felt that this was and even in 1979 in Tucson, Arizona when the church went through the problems at that time, Mr. Armstrong made the comment that these problems aren’t difficult. He said, “I faced a whole lot worse trials and problems in the beginning days of the church”, in the beginning days of this particular work that he was doing. And he talked about all of those things that he had endured. The idea that at some point in your life you will go through a trial that will seem incomprehensible, a trial that you believe you cannot get through. You can’t start tomorrow. You can’t get up in the morning. You can’t go next week; it’s that type of thing. That at some point in time we face a trial of that nature. How can that be good? How can that be good?

The scriptures clearly identify that as Christians we will suffer trials and difficulties. I always liked the old Hank Williams song, the last song, I guess, he ever recorded, if you’re familiar with the singer Hank Williams, the senior. His last song is “I will never get out of this world alive.” I’ll never get out of this world alive. You know it’s not going to happen. You’re going to face difficulties and trials; you will suffer persecution. Consider individuals. Jesus Christ died a horrible death. All the apostles except John died as martyrs. Elijah died of an illness without being healed. The apostles were imprisoned for their teaching. Paul was not healed of an affliction. He had to suffer with it his entire ministry. So what does Romans 8:28 mean? What does it have to do with us today? Let’s go back to this particular verse again. What does it NOT say? What does it not say? We can see that it does not say that you will never have anything bad happen to you; the verse does not say that. Also, this verse is not promised to everyone. There are restrictions on this promise. This promise does not say that disease will never happen to you. It does not say that calamity will never happen to you. The promise does not say you will never be affected by another person’s evil either. It doesn’t say those things. If it doesn’t say those things, what DOES it say?

Let’s go back now, let’s begin in verse 1 of Romans 8 and let’s understand what Paul is saying in this peculiar verse that as some would say is the most often quoted verse from the Bible. Let’s begin in verse 1. What is the context of this verse? One of the things we’ve always been taught is “get the context”. What is this verse actually saying? Don’t just read the verse; find out what it actually says. What is it telling us? Beginning in verse 1:
**Romans 8:1** There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

This chapter, these verses are about spirit. They’re about spirit. It’s not about flesh but the spirit. Immediately we must see who Paul’s audience is. One of the old rules from Spokesman’s Club is “Know your Audience,” isn’t it? Who’s the audience here that Paul is speaking to? Paul is speaking to those who are spirit-minded and not those who are fleshly-minded. It is those who can see the spiritual meaning behind life. So he says:

**Romans 8:1-7** There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. (He’s speaking to people who walk according to the spirit. He’s speaking to people who follow a path that Jesus Christ walked before us.) For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. (You could certainly understand that the penalty of breaking the law is death. And of course, breaking the law is sin. It becomes a law of itself.) For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law (verse 4) might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (So Paul repeats this term. He’s writing to those who walk according to the spirit and not according to the flesh.)

**Verses 5-7:** For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. (Paul is going to write some very deep things here. These are for people who are spirit-minded. These are for people who committed their lives to God. This is not for the world. This is not for people who refuse to acknowledge or accept the spiritual life that Jesus Christ led that we must follow. Paul is writing to a different group of people.) ....for those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

So the law of God is central. To be spirit minded you must follow God’s law! You cannot go contrary to God’s law or you are carnally minded. You are physically minded. You are not of the spirit, you are of the flesh. So Paul makes a very important point as he begins this section of scripture. Again, we know that when this was written it was a manuscript, it wasn’t divided in chapters and verses but there are topics that follow through, certainly in the book of Romans. The book of Romans is about justification. The book of Romans is about repentance, justification and salvation. It’s how we get there. What stages do we go through?

**Romans 8 12-14** Therefore, brethren, we are debtors--not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Here’s the key. You must be led by the Spirit if you’re going to be a child of God. There is no shortcut, brethren. You must be overwhelmed by God’s spirit. You must certainly follow this
way of life, follow where Christ has led and you must be dominated by His Holy Spirit. Our lives are to achieve that, to come into conformity with Jesus Christ and to be dominated by the spirit of God and not by the flesh.

I saw a diagram a few years ago of how to teach this particular subject. Now what was an interesting way of looking at it, that the human being struggles with two, there are struggles that go on within a human being. We struggle against the world, we’re told that, and we struggle against the wiles of Satan the devil. So we’ve got these two struggles. The reality is its only one struggle. It’s a struggle between flesh and spirit. It’s a struggle that Satan controls the world and Satan wants nothing more than to cause you to stumble and achieve the fleshly, you know, the fleshly desires as opposed to the following of God’s spirit. Your life and my life are seeking to be dominated by God’s spirit and not by flesh. The more we’re dominated by flesh the more carnal we are, the more things go wrong and the more we find ourselves in defiance of God. And the more we’re dominated by God’s spirit, the more we become like Jesus Christ, and the closer we draw to God and, of course, becoming His children in the Kingdom of God.

**Romans 8:15** *For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

There’s a bit of a controversy over the word “adoption”. Does that mean we are truly not the children of God? The word here for adoption actually has within it, it’s *Huiothesia*. *Huio* means child or son and *thesia*, of course, refers to God. So adoption here literally means a child of God. How do we get there when we were children of the flesh? We can only get there through God’s Holy Spirit, only through God’s spirit.

**Romans 8:16-17** *The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified...*

This section of scriptures devoted to the children of God. How do we get from being dominated by the flesh to dominated by God’s spirit? How do we get there?

**Romans 18-28** *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (We cannot get there without suffering. We cannot get there without difficulty. We cannot get there without trials.) For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.*

So all of the physical is moaning and groaning for the deliverance, for the spiritual to come. Everything that God has done from Creation until now is with one goal in mind and that is the Kingdom of God, a spirit filled and certainly spirit world in the sense that the spirit beings who will be children of God, but notice verse 23. **Verse 23-28** *Not only they, (not only this world moans) but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within...*
ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance. (or with patience.) Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know (Connected to hope, connected to trial, connected to groaning, connected to being a child of God. We know what?) that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

The context of these verses tells us the real answer. We must focus on the Kingdom of God and not this earthly existence. We must be led by the Holy Spirit or we’re not the sons of God. Everything in this life is to bring us into glory. We must be conformed to Jesus Christ. We must step out of the flesh and into the Spirit. We must think like God and not like man. Our goal is the Kingdom of God and nothing in this life can satisfy that goal. Nothing in this life can satisfy that goal. If you analyze Romans 8 verse 28, you begin to see the answer. And we know, we don’t’ think it, we know it. This is the most significant part of this verse. We must know, we cannot doubt. Do you really know? Do you absolutely with no reservation know that God exists, that God is your Father and that Jesus Christ is your Savior and that you WILL walk in His footsteps? And we know.

George Barnard did a survey back in 1991 and found that only 23% of people who professed to be Christians believe in absolute truth. Where we know. Do you know? Do you know that you know? And we know what? That all things; all means all. I’m using the New King James Translation. As I said, there are two possible ways to translate this verse but I believe both are considered appropriate, both are found in various manuscripts, but that all things, all means all. It is defined as the whole of every member or individual, the whole number or sum of everyone. And you know that all things. All, therefore, includes the bad things, the tragedies, the illnesses and the disappointments. All things includes all things, the ups and downs of the human life; all things. We know what? That all things work together.

Even the wrongs that happen to us in life would be included in all things. A reporter once was interviewing an old man on his hundredth birthday. “What are you most proud of?” the reporter asked. “Well,” said the man, “I don’t have an enemy in the world.” “What a beautiful thought!” said the reporter. “How inspirational that is!” To which the man replied, “Yes, I outlived every last one of them.” All things that happen. All things, God says, work together.

Genesis 50 verse 20 is an unusual verse in the Bible. If you’ll turn there you’ll notice that Joseph, Joseph who was in prison, Joseph who was sold by his brothers and spent probably a dozen years or more locked away in prison for something he had never done, you know what Joseph said? He said, “What you did to me worked good. It actually turned out to save people’s lives.” It brought him to Egypt and brought him there to save humanity to some degree at that particular time. He makes a claim that God used the deeds of his brothers to do good. How on earth could you figure that out? If you were sold by your brother or sister into slavery and to find out many years later that you are in a position where you can save human lives. All things. All things work
together. Things don’t just happen. If we see the big picture, we can say that everything that happens in our lives will fit into a mosaic that will aid us into the Kingdom of God. Remember the focus of this section of scripture is the kingdom and spiritual matters, not physical.

The word work comes from the word *sunergei*, as I said earlier. It’s present tense. It’s an ongoing activity. Events have a place and they fit into a theme. There is no predestination except to say that it will benefit you in the final analysis. You have free moral agency. You can make choices in life. You’re not predestined to do certain things. You make that choice, but if you’re following God and you’re spiritual, and you’re spiritual, you’ll find that as life goes on, there is something coming. There’s a future and all things in your life will play a part in that. One can look at the past and have faith. One can look ahead to the future and have faith but it’s the present that causes us to stumble the most. How can you see what is happening to you today and still have faith? Yet we are told that all things work together. All things work together. The word synergy comes from that which means a generation of where you can have two or three that generates more power than if there were three people individually; where it all works together. So your lifetime of activity and events are going to have a part in making you who you are. Your choices in life will have something to say with who you are. Are you spirit minded? Are you fleshly minded? Are you following God or are you not following God? There really are only a couple of choices; there are only two choices in life. You either follow God or you follow another path.

Notice the next phrase, ‘work together for good’. This is also a key phrase in this verse. What is the goal of all things working together? For good; ultimately it is for good. When the term good is used, is it referring to health or wealth? Is that what we think, or is this something spiritual? Remember the context of this is spiritual. What is good? Wealth, physical health, abundant friends, successful business, fame and power, do all things work together for this kind of good? Or ultimately isn’t there only one spiritual good and that is the Kingdom of God.

1 Corinthians 15, verse 19, the apostle Paul says:

1 Corinthians 15:19  (If there is no resurrection) …then we are of all men the most pitiable.

We deserve pity if there is no future. If there is no Kingdom of God, it’s not worth it. If there is no Kingdom of God, why should we even be trying to do the things that we do? The Kingdom of God is the future. It is spiritual.

The next part of this phrase says …to them that love God who are called according to his purpose. These are the recipients of this wonderful promise. We cannot underestimate what it means to love God. Christ said that this was the first commandment. We cannot lose sight of the fact that we were called according to His purpose. We were called for a reason. We were called for the future and not for this life. 2 Corinthians 2, verse 14 is an interesting verse about what you and I should be like as Christians. 2 Corinthians 2, verse 14 says:

2 Corinthians 2:14  Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.
You think about that verse. Have you ever been on an elevator or stepped on an elevator where somebody had been on it that had a little bit too much perfume on and you just can’t get that smell out? It lingers where that person has been and you can follow that person all over the hotel and you know that they were there because of that fragrance. Well in one sense, God describes Christianity that way; that wherever you have been, you should have left a mark behind. It’s like leaving a fragrance behind of what God is really like. You are a child of God. You are committed to God. You are spirit driven and not fleshly driven. Wherever you go you should have an impact on other people that should leave like a fragrance left behind. When you’re gone, it’s still there. People see that and people understand that.

Romans 8, verse 28 is a powerful verse. It is a wonderful promise. There are things it doesn’t say. There are things it does say. It’s about another life. It’s not just about this life. *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God to those who are the called according to His purpose.*

We are being prepared for another life much greater than this physical life. All things will work together for the good in this journey toward eternal life. We cannot doubt God and His promises. We must know that all of His promises will be fulfilled. When God heals someone, that is a great miracle and something special for that person. When someone dies and is buried and is awaiting the resurrection, that is still something that we look forward to. That is still something we acknowledge and accept. If you love God, and we all should, if you are called according to His purpose, then all things work together for the ultimate goal; your birth into the Kingdom of God. Rest assured that God does not lie. We should not be in either ditch. Those who believe that if something bad happens, it’s always your fault, or those who believe that God does not fulfill His promises. God promises, we believe and we groan for that day when all good will be revealed; the day when God makes it clear how all things worked together to produce a child of God. One conformed in the image of Christ. We are here to look forward even in the midst of trials.

We have gone through a major trial; it’s a major trial in all of our lives. The trials aren’t over yet. In spite of the daunting task before us now, we must rejoice, we must thank God for what He has done and we must go forward. Romans 8:28 says it very well.

Let’s rest on this promise. Let’s rejoice and praise God and let’s move forward. Life is a journey with bumps along the way. The destination is what matters most. Stay on the road, learn the lessons of life; God will certainly see us through. All things work together for the good.