

## **Life Verses: Providence**

Romans 8:28-39

I can't tell you how great it is to be here. You have welcomed us warmly. I look forward to re-connecting with those I know and establishing new relationships with those I don't

When I heard that we would be appointed to St. John. I was at first deeply relieved. That relief then turned to outright excitement which has not abated. I don't think it ever will.

I left here some 23 years ago. I can't even begin to comprehend that. Since then I've had a lifetime of experiences that I pray have fitted me well for this season in the life of this great church.

I have thought often down through the years that I would have been quite contented to have simply stayed here all along, but as we both know the bishop and, I want to think, the Lord had other things in store—for you and for me.

This is the second time now that I have returned to a church I have previously served—the first time to St. Paul and now to St. John. I guess I'm like an old shoe. I just sort of wear well. I think you'll find that to be the case.

When you get me you also get Cheryl. She is the love of my life and has been with me all along through thick and thin. She, like me, looks forward to digging in.

When you get Cheryl and me, you also get Charlie. He's our year and a half old black lab who is way more puppy than dog, and who by the way pushes 85 pounds. That makes for an interesting combination.

I understand that last week was "Take Your Dog to Work Week." I am here to report that I resisted. He would have done just fine though. He loves to meet new people as much as Cheryl and I do.

Cheryl and I do feel that we are living into God's will for our lives, how could we not when we find ourselves in the same neighborhood with our beloved Henry and Owen, not to mention a congregation filled with people we have loved for a long, long time.

### **Don't Lose Faith, God Is with You**

The past few months have been something else. Once we heard that Bishop Fairley had it in mind for us to move we waited for what the next season in life would bring.

We have trusted that all of this has been God's will and not so much what's deemed by the church.

I quipped here over the past few weeks that "I can preach a very compelling sermon on trusting God, living that out is another thing entirely."

I've had to remind myself about such things in regard to the sale of our home, which has yet to sell.

When it comes to my life, and I figure for yours also, it's all too easy for trust to wane when things seem to be out of our control. Things can get overwhelming at times, can't they?

Don't lose faith, God is with you.

James Merritt puts it this way, "*Never doubt in the dark what God has told you in the light.*"

### **God's Got This**

I have had to remind myself over and over again in the mix of all Cheryl and I have dealt with over the past few months that God's got this.

You have had to do that as well. I figure you heard about Dan's move nearly four months ago.

He and Barbie have had a wonderful ministry here. Theirs was eleven years of fruitful ministry. Every one of you was wonderfully touched. God certainly blessed you through them and thereby blessed the ministry of this church.

It's not easy letting go of two persons who mean so much to you and I recognize that.

So I invite you to join me in praying for my good friend Dan as he begins a new chapter of ministry that is very much different than anything he has ever done. And I might say a little tongue in cheek, "Better thee, than me."

In the mix of all of that let's recognize that this church is in a bit of transition. The arrival of new senior leadership all but guarantees it.

You are emerging from a season of uncertainty, just like Cheryl and I have, and in the midst of that God never stopped working.

So then let's affirm together that "God's got this."

We have every reason to be hopeful. There is every reason to be optimistic. God has good things in store. After all, God's never stopped working.

If anything, we pause today to claim very confidently that God is guiding and directing our ways. Again, let's affirm, "God's got this."

### **Life Verses**

Throughout the summer we will be sharing together a sermon series called, "*Life Verses.*"

To be quite honest with you, we will be considering a set of scriptures that have had tremendous effect upon my life, hence the title, *“Life Verses.”* Some of them might even be favorites of yours.

We’ll be considering these “life verse” for two reasons. First, I hope you are able to learn a little bit about me and how God has formed me spiritually. Second, I want to encourage you to consider what your own “life verses” might be.

One of those “life verses” for me is Romans 8:28. It’s been quite helpful, particularly these past few weeks as Cheryl and I have been considering God’s providence for our lives.

You hear the word “providence” and you readily hear the word “provide.”

You know the verse, *“And we know in all things God works for the good of those who love him and have been called according to his purpose.”* (Romans 8:28)

### **God Works for Good**

Three words immediately come to the fore: we, know, and all.

- **We**, those who love God. **We**, those who make every effort to respond to God’s purposes. **We** who are called God’s children. **We** who are a part of his family.
- Because of that we **know** that God is with us come what may. We are endued with a certain confidence that God is fast at work. We live with a trust that he’s got our backs every time and, if not our backs, then certainly our hearts.
- **All** things then are permeated with his wonderworking power—not some things, not even most things, but **all** things. We might not always see it at the time, but “God is at work in **all** things to bring about his good purposes.”

Some versions translate Romans 8:28 this way, “All things work together for the good for those who love God and are called according to his purposes.”

That’s a subtle, but very distinct difference. You and I both know from experience that “things,” particularly “all things” don’t just work out. Sometimes they do, but not all the time.

The better translation of this verse puts God front and center, where God is the active agent. Some of the oldest and best manuscripts for this passage have the words “ho theos” as the subject of the sentence.

God, “ho theos,” is actively working to bring about his good purposes. That gives me great solace, particularly given everything that seems at times to be working against us.

I like the story told of a fellow who was shipwrecked on a deserted island. All he had were a few things that washed up on shore with him.

He was quick to build a shelter to protect him and those possessions from the elements. He also built a fire to keep him warm at night.

As the days wore on he wondered if he would ever be rescued.

One day he went to the other side of the island to look for food, only to look up and see a plume of smoke. He knew right then and there that the fire was now burning his shelter and all his possessions inside it.

He prayed, “God how could you let this happen?”

When he got back from the other side of the island, he discovered a couple of rescue boats headed his way. When the rescuers arrived, the man asked, “How did you know I was here?”

“We saw the smoke,” they said.

God does work in mysterious ways. We don’t always see it. We don’t always recognize it. We don’t always acknowledge it.

Rest assured though God is fast at work on our behalf to bring about his good purposes.

### **Notice Then Where God Is at Work and Join Him**

Another Greek word of note in this verse is the word “synergos.” It’s akin to our English word, synergy.

We might read things this way—God, as active agent, is constantly working together with those who respond to his good purposes for their lives.

Joining God in his good purposes is the very thing he wants us to do and when we do it, it brings him great delight.

Henry Blackaby in his book, *Experiencing God* writes to those who wonder about the will of God, “Notice where God is at work and join him.”

Let’s be honest, you and I don’t always notice God at work. We don’t always live with eyes that see or ears that hear. Even so, God is still at work.

All too often our focus strays to the mundane, and if not to the mundane, then to those circumstances that conspire to overwhelm us.

We wonder where God is in the midst of our distress. We begin to doubt whether or not he is present to provide a way.

God is at work to bring about his good purposes. It’s his way for those who love him and are called according to his purposes.

## Questions and Answers

Paul doesn't claim in this great passage that it's going to come up roses all the time. As we know even a rose bush has thorns.

Situations are such that we are weighed down supremely. Trouble and hardship are just a part of life. Uncertainties come at us all the time.

In light of that Paul asks a series of questions with the intent to hearten his readers.

*“If God is for us, who can be against us?”*

- “He who did not spare his Son, but gave him up for us all—will also, along with him, graciously give us all things.”

*“Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?”*

- It is God who justifies.

*“Who then is the one who condemns?”*

- No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”

*“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?”*

- “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”
- “For I am convinced,” says Paul, “that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

“I am convinced,” says Paul. Are you so convinced? Are you so convinced that the Lord of the universe is fast at work to bring about his good purposes now and for all eternity? Are you so convinced of his love that your life is just different from the rest of the world?

Are you so convinced that “the long providential arm of the Lord” extends to you, even you?

The way you answer will go a long way toward how you live your life.

The Four Spiritual Law of Campus Crusade for Christ fame states simply that *“God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.”*

## **Led, Sustained, and Empowered**

Every once and a while when running, I'll get sort of lost, sometimes really lost. I did that last July on the last day of a mission trip I took to Paraguay.

I had been running for about 45 minutes and it became quite clear that I wasn't noticing anything familiar.

I stopped to ask a couple of people for directions, but they spoke Spanish. I knew then I was in trouble. After a while—a long while—I finally made it back. I was even met by a young lady from our team who was sent by the others to look for me.

When you get lost like that you can:

- Try to backtrack
- Follow your intuition
- Read the signs
- Ask for help
- Hope somebody is out there to trying to find you

I don't feel lost here. I do so believe that God has led us here, will sustain us here, and empower us here, all of this accomplished by the one who is fast at work to bring about his good purposes.

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Let's admit it life is full of all sorts of questions. While making our way through we are left to wonder what in the world is going on.

A verse like Romans 8:28 keeps us centered. God is at work to bring about his good purposes. It is his way and will for those he loves so dearly.

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So I drove up the other day and noticed the warm welcome on the sign out front. "Welcome Pastor Tom and Cheryl Grieb!"

No question mark, only an exclamation point as if to proclaim that God has got this and we have every reason to rejoice.