

I have always been Christian. I've always been Lutheran. I haven't always been a pastor. And I'm not just talking about the time growing up when you don't have a job. There was a time in my life when I dreamed in architecture. In fact beginning already in junior year of high school I set out on a path to being an architect. I went to college and got a degree in architecture. I stayed up late huddled over pieces of trace paper with sketches all over them. I daydreamed about buildings and how I would design them someday. I built models, put ink on special paper, and presented to a jury of architects and professors. It was at the same time awesome and horrifying.

She was in architecture too and we met at the firm I started working for after graduation. Early on in our new relationship my then future wife and I were getting to know each other by going to each other's church. After she attended mine she had a lot of questions. As I tried to answer them I told her about a class she could take with the pastor. In that class he would answer any and all of her questions. It had been sometime since I sat through a basic Christianity class, but we went together. The pastor answered questions, but always from God's Word. He presented nothing but God's Word. I watched as unbelievers got it. It was free. They didn't need to earn God's love or his forgiveness. I told Jennifer how awesome that was. I also told her about a long ago forgotten thought I had when I was younger, like seventh or eighth grade. I used to think maybe I should be a pastor. Seeing God's Word open people's eyes had sparked that thought to return. Her words will forever stick with me. Why don't you go and try it. She was the first person in my life to ever encourage me to become a pastor. Since then she hasn't been the only. My pastor, my parents, and others quickly seconded her encouragement. But it was no coincidence that Jennifer is in my life and I am where I am today.

That's the way God operates. No coincidences. No luck, no chance. I am not a Christian by luck. I'm not Lutheran by chance. And I'm not a pastor just by coincidence. You are where you are not by luck, chance, or coincidence either. Today's Word of Romans is chosen. God expresses through the apostle Paul just how it is that you became who you are. You were...

**Chosen in God's grace  
Things work out for good  
Glory is coming**

When you heard from someone, "We're going to do this no matter what" you knew there were no outs. They couldn't wiggle out and they didn't intend to either. Of course if things got completely out of control, or things happened no one could have seen coming, there was a way to pull the plug. God doesn't leave himself any outs. **"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him."** There's no escape plan if something happens in the life of a Christian that seems super bad. God has to work it out for good. He said he would. Doesn't matter good bad, doesn't matter if everyone saw it coming or no one did, God obligates himself to work it out for good.

God also lifts the burden off of us. There's nothing about loving God enough before he'll love you. There's no qualification you have to meet before God will love you. The focus is entirely on God. God loved you first. God loves you and everything that happens in your life as a Christian will turn out for your good. Who gets to decide what's good? Not me or you but God. Good is what's helpful for you. Not becoming rich and famous, not having everything go exactly your way all the time, not having life happen to your liking. Good with God is always focused on God and on the end. The end is getting to heaven. God is always focused on getting the Christian to heaven.

That's where most get tripped up and stumble. They want to define good. So when something happens that I figure isn't good I have every right to get on God's case. He promised and look, something isn't good, so it must be him. That sickness didn't work out the way I thought it should. I kept getting sicker. And what was it good for? What benefit did I experience because of getting sick? God must have failed in working it out for my good. The relationship with my family member isn't what I thought it should be. It isn't good. That must be another place where God isn't making good on his promise to make everything good.

This statement isn't all inclusive, it isn't for everybody. It's only for the chosen. **"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."** How does one get called? Does it require me to love God a certain amount? How will I know if I've met that condition? Relax. You were chosen in God's grace. He loves you. He loved you first and he loves you best. His purpose and plan was to love you and choose you. And he isn't making it up as he goes along. Nothing catches God off guard. He knows. Everything in your life he's already fit into his plan. All the events that have or will ever happen in this world fit together into his purpose. And for whose benefit? Yours and mine. We are objects of God's love in Christ. In Christ we were chosen from eternity to be his. And in Christ God fits us into his plan and purpose. So in Christ we can know that everything will work out for our good, our good being getting us to heaven.

If only that were always plain to us how. But we may not see it this side of heaven. Sometimes we know, sometimes we see. But we don't that doesn't diminish our trust in him. We have confidence in the promises of God that say he will do this. He's chosen us in his grace. In Christ we are his. So he is working things out for our eternal good. The timing may not always be what we think is best. It may not be what we expect. But these aren't reasons to distrust God. Rather they're reasons to fall back to trusting in him more.

We get so focused on the present. We notice the things that happen to us today, now. When they hurt we want that to immediately be good instead. We want God to make it clear to us how he's doing that or how he will do that. And we don't want to wait long. God is going to make them turn out for our good even if we can't always see how. Trust him. More important is the future God has planned for us. Glory is coming and it's been planned for a very long time.

God knew you before you were ever born. He knew all of us before we were born, before Adam and Eve were created. God also knew those that would be his, the chosen, before the world was created. Not that he put everyone of all time up against a wall and just started randomly picking people. You're with me, you're against me. There is no random with God. There is only grace. In grace he chose. Because he knew us ahead of time and chose us in grace he could also work in us just as soon as we were born. He could protect us and bring us through life with purpose. He could work faith in us so we're seen as perfect, just like his Son. **"For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son."** That isn't by chance.

Once you and I were chosen by grace in eternity it was no big deal for God to complete all the other steps to get his chosen to heaven. In grace he didn't just foreknow but he also predestined. He didn't just predestine he also called. He didn't just call he also justified. He didn't just justify he also glorified. All part of the purposeful plan of God. He chose, he marked off and protected, he called out of the world, he declared not guilty, and he glorified. You've experienced as reality all of those steps except the last. But it's not in question or doubt. Everything else God promised has happened. The glory is coming.

It's the times that hurt, that's where there seem to be breaks in the glorious chain. When pain happens or hurt stings it seems like the chain is broken. And what about all those people who aren't Christian? How was it that I got put on this chain and someone else didn't? Was I just lucky? And what do I have to do to pay God back, to stay close to him? I have to love him enough. I have to make sure I stick close. I can't fail or I'll lose everything.

Bring the focus back to God, his grace, his mercy, and his decisions made in love before the world was created. You were chosen in grace. You heard God's call through the Word. It's the same call to all. Same gospel, same grace to all. One Savior was sent by God, and one Savior saved the world through his actions. Only one time did Jesus have to live a perfect life. Only one time did Jesus have to die on the cross. Only one time did Jesus have pay for all sins. God has done everything necessary for our salvation. It all happens in God's grace and mercy. Jesus is just **"the firstborn among many brothers."**

There's glory in heaven that we won't miss out on. It's ours because we have been chosen by God's grace. God did it all. God's purpose and plans will happen. He will work all things out that happen to you and me for our eternal good. We live in the plan God is finishing for us. Give him the glory for the glory that's coming. We are brothers and sisters of Christ. So live as ones who have been chosen in God's grace and who will be with Christ someday forever.