



GOD IS FOR US

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Romans 8:26-34
Dorman Followwill
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I came across a story that reminded me of my Father in heaven, only this father lives in Armenia. This story comes out of the time of the devastating earthquake that flattened much of Armenia in 1989. It measured 8.2 on the Richter scale, killing 30,000 people in less than four minutes.

In the chaotic aftermath of the quake, one father left his wife safely at home to rush to the school his son attended. He found the school building collapsed upon itself, with rubble everywhere. After the initial paralyzing shock, he remembered a promise he had once made to his son, "No matter what, I'll always be there for you." Remembering the face of his son, tears filled his eyes. He looked at the flattened mass of concrete and debris before him, and it seemed as if he would never see his son again. But over and over in his mind he kept remembering the words of his promise.

He began to focus on the part of the building he would walk his son to when he dropped him off each morning. He knew that his son's classroom was in the back right corner of the building, so he resolutely walked to that area of the rubble and began digging. As he was digging, other distraught parents came to look at the school, crying, "My son!" "My daughter!" Other parents tried to pull the father off the rubble, saying such things as "It's too late!" or "They're dead!" or "You can't help them!" or "You'll just make things worse," or even "Go home!" But to each parent who tried to dissuade him, he simply said, "Are you going to help me now?" Then he returned to his work, removing the rubble handful by handful.

The fire chief tried to pull him off the remains of the school, saying, "Fires are breaking out, explosions are happening everywhere. You're in danger. We'll take care of it. Go home." But the father again replied, "Are you going to help me now?" and he kept right on digging. A policeman came by, saying, "You're angry and distraught. It's over. You're endangering others. Go home. We'll handle it." Looking at the policeman, he simply said, "Are you going to help me now?" But no one helped. The father dug alone.

He dug for eight hours, 12 hours, 24 hours, 36 hours, until the 38th hour, when he pulled back a large stone and heard his son's voice. He screamed his son's name, "Armand!" He heard back, "Dad? It's me, Dad! I told the other kids not to worry. I told them that if you were alive, you'd save me and when you saved me, they'd be saved. You promised, 'No matter what, I'll always be there for you!' You did it, Dad!"

"What's going on in there? How is it?" the father asked. "There are 14 of us left out of 33, Dad. We're scared, hungry, thirsty and thankful you're here. When the building collapsed, it made a wedge, like a triangle, and it saved us." His father then said, "Come on out, boy!" But Armand replied, "No, Dad! Let the other kids out first, because I know you'll get me! No matter what, I know you'll be there for me!"¹

When all of life comes crashing down around us, when the day of disaster strikes, we can be certain our Father has prom-

ised to be there for us. Let's study his absolute promise to us, that our God is for us, no matter what.

What we need to know

I want us to think deeply about the darkest days of our lives. Perhaps those dark days are present now in your life. Perhaps they are a remembrance of days gone by, dark seasons you do not wish to recall. But this morning I want you to think about those times, because in today's study we find real comfort for our darkest days. I have found that it is easy to study Romans 8, the greatest news in the Bible, and rejoice in its message, without claiming its comfort in the hour of need. Today I want us to seize and hold the comfort of the most encouraging passage in the New Testament.

How many of you face a problem in life that is so difficult and deeply rooted that you have prayed about it for years, without any seeming answer? How many times have bad circumstances piled up against you, so that you feel like the mighty hand of God is crushing you under an unbearable weight? How many of you feel like you are trapped by your own weaknesses and the circumstances you find yourselves in? If you think about the very darkest days in your life, there is usually one bleak theme running through them all: you feel terribly isolated. Alone. The evil one works on us by lying to us, telling us that our problem is unique, that we are unable to make choices that will make the problems easier to bear, and he often leads us to compare ourselves to those whose lives seem to be going so well. The worst pain of the dark day is the feeling of isolation.

Who has not felt terrifyingly alone? Who has not stooped to compare himself to others when he is having a bad year and they are having the best year of their lives? Who has not felt the cold touch of spiritual warfare, making you doubt your God and doubt your standing with him? Who has not felt the horror of isolation?

But this passage at the end of Romans 8 shows us how God surrounds us, embraces us and loves us absolutely throughout the lightest and the darkest days of our lives. He does not leave us alone. He comes to us. We are *not alone*. Our God is *for us*, no matter what. This is what each one of us needs to know.

My wife Blythe grew up here in the Bay Area. So did her mother, who lived in Burlingame during the Depression, when she was a little girl. She had to live with her French grandmother for several years during the Depression, because her own parents divorced and neither could take care of their little girl. Imagine that: being a child during the Depression, going through a divorce, having to move into another house with neither parent. It was a time of great upheaval, certainly a time of darkness. Often she would get scared, and ask her French grandmother, "What if we run out of money? What if..." And every time she came up with a new "What if?" question, the French grandmother would say nothing. She would just pat her little coin purse she carried in her right pocket, as if to say, "Everything will be okay, little

one." It is my prayer that the truth we study today will be like golden coins in a coin purse in your pocket that you can carry with you for the rest of your life, truth you can bank on.

Paul gives us these three coins of truth in Romans 8:26-34, using the phrase "for us" three times. If you are a Bible "circler," circling key words in your Bible, like me, you might want to circle these three "for us" phrases. Paul starts by saying that the Holy Spirit intercedes "for us" in verse 26, a truth so important he repeats and sharpens it in verse 27, by saying the Spirit intercedes "for the holy ones." The Holy Spirit is within us and for us. And God our Father is for us in all circumstances, literally every single situation, weaving all circumstances together for good. Our Father is hand-designing every aspect of our lives in such a way that Paul considers the sovereign love of the Father and asks, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" in verse 31. Our Father's love for us is proven in the gift of his Son to die for us. But the Son lives, and he lives in glory at the right hand of the Father's Majesty in heaven, and there the Son is for us, interceding for us, pleading our cause. Here on earth, even inside us at this moment, God the Spirit is for us; up in heaven, even at the right hand of the throne of God, God the Son is for us; and in all things, all circumstances, past, present, and future, our Father God is for us. We are not alone: God is for us, no matter what, in each part of the Trinity.

The Spirit is for us, from within us

In Romans 8:26-27, Paul explains how the Holy Spirit of God living within us is for us:

And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the holy ones according to the will of God. (Rom 8:26-27 NASB)

In these verses, Paul employs the preposition *hyper* in Greek, appending it to the verb "intercede" in verse 26 and letting it stand alone in verse 27. The preposition *hyper* means "on our behalf, for us." It is specifically *for our good, on our behalf*, that the Spirit hears our internal groanings, that the Spirit fathoms the depths of our pain that we ourselves cannot plumb, and translates that pain to the Father in a God-talk too deep for human words. The moment-by-moment ministry of the Spirit in listening to our pain and considering our struggling and bearing the message of our pain to our Father is entirely *for us*. In our pain, our God is not silent, though we cannot hear him with human ears. When we hurt the most, the messages between the Spirit inside and our Father in heaven flow constantly. The Spirit is God's indwelling Comforter, a very real comfort in the dark day.

I remember one dark day in my life, in fact the worst single day of my life, in January 1998. I shared this story with you here five years ago shortly after it happened, but it stands in my memory still today as my personal nightmare day. It was a day when I was going to have a major confrontation with the leadership at my work, and I knew the great likelihood was that this confrontation would result in my resignation, and most likely a complete change of career at mid-life. I was 35 at the time. Now I don't know how many of you love confrontation, but I definitely do not. I will confront when my Lord convinces me it is necessary, as it was that dark day, but it makes me nervous, and on that day the stakes could not have been higher.

The confrontation was scheduled for high noon, but I woke up in a cold sweat at 5:00 a.m. and had to pray for an hour

just to muster the strength to get out of bed. I went into work at 9:00 a.m. with butterflies ruling my stomach. But at 10:00 a.m. my phone rang. It was my dad, calling me from over a thousand miles away. My dad is one of the prayer warriors in my life, but he knew absolutely nothing about what I was facing that day, as we had not spoken for several weeks prior. As soon as I picked up the phone, he said, "Hello! Boy, am I glad you answered. I woke up this morning with the Lord burdening my heart for you. I knew I had to call you, and tell you something (pause, and at this point I could tell he choked up) ... I just wanted to tell you you are the best son a father could have." My dad wept on that call, and so did I. It was my heavenly Father, communicating through my earthly father a word of love and affirmation for me on the darkest day of my life, across a thousand miles. We are *not* alone. God is with us.

Since becoming a Christian over 20 years ago, every time I have walked in darkness I have known the comfort of the Spirit one with my human spirit just when I needed it most. I am with you, was his simple message in the ears of my soul. His quiet comfort has given me hope far beyond myself. The Spirit is for us, praying to God on our behalf, and whispering God's loving care to us just when we need it most.

Hymns often teach us the most about these deep things of God. There is an old hymn, *Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart*, that I want to quote in full. It was written by a seasoned pastor who had labored 19 years in a church in the darkest slum of London. He knew that comfort in the dark is found in the Spirit. Here is his desire for the ministry of the Spirit in his life:

Spirit of God, descend upon my heart:
Wean it from earth, through all its pulses move.
Stoop to my weakness, mighty as Thou art,
And make me love Thee as I ought to love.

Hast Thou not bid us love Thee, God and King?
All, all Thine own soul, heart and strength and mind.
I see Thy cross there, teach my heart to cling;
O let me seek Thee, and O let me find.

Teach me to feel that Thou art always nigh;
Teach me the struggles of the soul to bear
To check the rising doubt, the rebel sigh;
Teach me the patience of unanswered prayer.

Teach me to love Thee as Thine angels love,
One holy passion filling all my frame:
The baptism of the heav'n descended Dove
My heart an altar and Thy love the flame.

The Spirit of God, the Dove in our breast, the flame of God's love lighting the altar of our hearts. The Spirit is for us in the darkness. His light shines for us, his love is for us, even when it is darkest. The Spirit's comfort is the greatest comfort there is, shining from deep within us, blazing brightly for us no matter what. This is the first golden coin of truth we can pat in our own coin purses.

The Father is for us in all circumstances

Paul then moves into the mysterious glories of Romans 8:28-31:

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. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and

whom He justified, these He also glorified.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? (8:28-31)

Paul considers the expansive plan and purpose of God for us, moving us from the smallest samples of sinful humanity to mold us and enlarge us into towering giants of glory in the heavenly realms of his kingdom. He changes and molds us by the pressure of his hand, guiding all circumstances to enlarge the stature of our souls to the height of the great God-Man, Jesus Christ. God is our potter: using every single revolving day like the potter uses the turning wheel, pressing us on all sides with his own expert fingers wet with our tears and grimed with the useless portions cut away from our lives, all the while, with every turn, fashioning us into the vessel of his life and glory that he intends to employ throughout all eternity. No revolving day or pressure on any side, within or without, comes upon us by accident: it is all part of the plan of the Master Potter. We are dizzied and molded, we are pressed and shaped beyond our will, all for the Master Potter's glory, as a work of his inscrutable art. But in every turn of the wheel, with every pressure brought to bear on us, he is for us, not against us.

Paul considers all this, and he distills down the entire eternal plan and purpose of God into one idea: *God is for us*. He was for us before time began, foreknowing us in the stillness before the first rising of the sun. He is for us in the stillness of our dark circumstances in the present time, or in the glorious noontime of our joy if this season is a sweet one. He is for us forever, from here to eternity. In Paul's mind, and in his letter to the Romans, all of the sovereign love of God for us expressed in Romans 8:28-30 boils down to the phrase in verse 31: *God is for us*.

In the epic tale *Robinson Crusoe*, Crusoe finds himself shipwrecked but saved, all alone on a deserted island, but healthy and whole. Over the first crushing days, as his isolation crept into his soul and weighed on him, he developed a two-sided list on a single piece of paper. On the left side of the list was the word "Evil," and on the right side was the word "Good." Here is the list:

□ Good	Evil
I am cast upon a horrible, desolate island, void of all hope of recovery.	But I am alive, and not drowned as all my ship's company was.
I am singled out and separated, as it were, from all the world to be miserable.	But I am singled out too from all the ship's crew to be spared from death; and He that miraculously saved me from death, can deliver me from this condition.
I am divided from all mankind, a solitaire, one banished from humane society.	But I am not starved and perishing on a barren place, affording no sustenance.
I have no clothes to cover me.	But I am in a hot climate, where if I had clothes I could hardly wear them.
I am without any defence or means to resist any violence of man or beast.	But I am cast on an island, where I see no wild beasts to hurt me, as I saw on the coast of Africa; and what if I had been shipwrecked there?
I have no soul to speak to, or relieve me.	But God wonderfully sent the ship in enough to the shore, that I have gotten out so many necessary things as will either supply my wants, or enable me to supply myself even as long as I live.
□	

What a list! The first two words under the last "Good" item say it all: *But God...* This is our unquenchable light in our day of darkness: *But God*. In the evil day, in spite of the evil circumstances seemingly designed to crush us, our God is working for us. *But God* is our blazing beacon light to rally to in the darkness. Our God is for us, no matter what, even in the greatest calamities of our lives.

Again, to fathom the depths of these truths, let's defer to the hymn-makers. William Cowper, the saint who struggled daily with mental illness and yet wrote glorious poems of praise to God, spoke of the mysterious movements of God in his most famous hymn, *God Moves in a Mysterious Way*. This hymn is thought to be the last hymn text Cowper wrote, and it is considered his reflection of God's sovereign leading throughout his lifetime:

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

You fearful saints, fresh courage take:
The clouds you so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.

Our Father God is for us, no matter what. In all things, he is working for us. He is there for us, the smiling face behind all our circumstances, bleak or blessed. With Paul, we must ask again: If God is for us, who is against us? Ain't nobody, no where, no how! This is the second golden coin of truth for our coin purses.

The Son is for us, from the heavens

So, the Spirit within us is for us here on earth, hovering and listening within our souls, comforting us with his prayers to the Father on our behalf. And our Father is for us throughout all eternity, molding and shaping all events and circumstances in our lives to our good as he shapes into us the character of Jesus Christ. The Spirit is for us, and our Father is for us, no matter what. But what about the Son?

The picture Paul draws for us of the Son of God interceding for us in Romans 8:32-34 is a powerful image to fix in our minds.

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. (8:32-34)

Can you see him in your mind, by faith? Where is Jesus Christ right now? He is standing, robed in the brilliantly shining white of the Transfiguration, his heavenly garb, arrayed as the great Authority over all heaven and earth. And what is this kingly figure doing? Is he delivering universal edicts? Is he yet judging all creatures? Is he receiving his justly deserved praise? Is he holding secret council with the 24 elders? No! He is standing beside the Father, the Ancient of Days en-

throned on high, and he is whispering into the Father's ear. We don't know for certain what he is saying, but there is one thing we know from what Paul tells us of this heavenly vision: every word he says is *for us*. Every word is a word spoken on our behalf. Nothing he says will result in judgment for us: every word is a seed of grace, sprouting for our good. Every word is *for us*. That's really all we need to know about what he is saying.

One poet, Annie Johnson Flint, wondered what words he prayed in the Father's ear on our behalf in her poem *The Intercessor*, based on Romans 8:34:

Infinite Wisdom and infinite Love,
Praying for me to the Father above,
Asking for me what Thou knowest is best –
Surely my heart in this knowledge can rest.
Wrapped in my darkness and ignorance here,
With Thy great prayer let me not interfere;
Let me not cross that petition divine,
Losing a blessing that might have been mine;
Teach me to pray, that Thy will, so begun,
May in my life and my spirit be done.
Here is my confidence, here can I rest;
Thou alone knowest and asketh the best.

That is it: we don't know what Jesus whispers in the Father's ear on our behalf, but we can rest that every word is for us, and he knows and asks the best. We can rest in the love of his advocacy for us.

Once again, the hymn writers say it best. Joseph Scriven wrote one of the best loved hymns in our hymnals, *What A Friend We Have In Jesus*. Scriven was raised to a life of wealth and distinction in Ireland, and he lived in a devoted family. But his life was touched with a great sorrow: on the night before his wedding, his fiancée drowned. In the ensuing days of his deep sorrow, Scriven discovered the depths of never-leaving love in intimacy with Jesus Christ. Years later, Scriven's mother became ill, and he wrote a letter to comfort her. He enclosed the words of a poem he had just written to remind her of the Friend who does not fail. Later on, Scriven himself fell ill, and a friend who came to visit him found a copy of that same poem on some scratch paper beside his bed. The friend read the lines and asked, "Who wrote those beautiful words?" Scriven replied, "The Lord and I did it between us." Here is that poem:

What a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful,
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer;
In His arms He'll take and shield thee,
Thou wilt find a solace there.

There is no closer Friend, closer than a brother, and there is no finer Advocate than our Jesus Christ, who speaks for us, on our behalf, in our Father's ear. This is the third golden coin of truth for our coin purses, to carry with us forever.

Conclusion: The love of God for us

It all boils down to this: *God is for us*. He loves us from within us here on earth, by the indwelling Spirit. He loves us in a sovereign way in all our circumstances, across all eternity, by our Father. He loves us up in heaven through the advocacy of Jesus Christ the Son. Father, Son and Spirit, God loves us. Father, Son and Spirit, God is for us. Amen and amen!

1. Story adapted from Jack Canfield et al, *Chicken Soup for the Father's Soul* (Deerfield Beach, Fla.: Health Communications, 2001), 273-4.

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