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May the God of peace fill you with all joy in believing!
Romans 8:28-30

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. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer!

Dear friends, whom God has made his own, and especially you, Dawson, on your confirmation,

Little four-year-old Susan sat very quietly next to her mother in the doctor's office. Susan knew why she was there, to get a shot, and she was not too thrilled about the idea of someone jabbing a needle into her arm. Her mother and father had tried to explain to her, "You need this shot, Susan. It's for your good, so that you don't get sick." But Susan wasn't so sure. When the nurse called her name, her mother had to drag her along. Once inside the room, the nurse assured Susan, "This will only hurt for a second." But now Susan could see the needle, and the fact that that needle would only be stuck in her arm for a second wasn't much comfort. Soon it was over, and Susan and her mother were walking out the door, a few tears still running down Susan's cheeks. Her mother asked her, "Was it really so terrible?" "No," Susan replied, and now that it was over, it was easier for her to accept the fact that the shot was for her good.

It was time for you to go to the hospital. It was time for you to lose your job. It was time for you to get cancer. It was time for you to lose a loved one. It was time for you to be crippled or blind. It was time for you to be in an accident. It was time for you--fill in the seemingly most terrible event in your life. Maybe you thought of the words, and maybe your pastor even came and read them to you: "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Maybe you wondered how that could be true!

We know that God loves us, so much that he gave his own dear Son to die on the cross to take our sins away and make us his own forever. That is what moves us to love God. We know that we can trust God in all things, and he will never let us down. But

sometimes, when we're in the midst of trouble or danger, like little Susan, we have a difficult time accepting the fact that this is for our good. We see only the momentary needle in the arm, instead of the permanent cure. At those times our problem is that we are failing to see the total picture, the eternal picture, that God, in his wisdom and love, is using our troubles to grant us eternal blessings, and they are not worthy to be compared with the eternal glory that will be ours in heaven.

The Apostle Paul, through inspiration, outlines that total picture for us today, and it's a beautiful one. He assures us: God foreknew you. God predestined you. God called you. God justified you. And God glorified you. As we discuss these acts of God and what they mean for us, may the Holy Spirit lead us to understand that God has a good and gracious purpose for everything that happens in our lives, even those things that seem like tragedies. God Has An Eternal Purpose For You!

The Apostle Paul begins at one end of eternity, the beginning of eternity, as if eternity has a beginning, and says that God foreknew you. What does that mean -- God foreknew you? We understand what it means to know someone. This is not just a knowing of someone, but really knowing them, like you know your children or parents, your husband or wife, or your best friend. You have a relationship with that person. So God knew you, Dawson. He foreknew you. People can know each other before they actually meet. It used to be there were many romances that began through letter-writing, and then when the two people met, they already knew much about each other. Now of course there's e-mail, texting and video-chat.

But God's foreknowledge is a far greater thing. He foreknew us before we even existed, before the world began. In eternity, God knew us. His relationship with us had already begun. He loved us. God tells us, "I have loved you with an everlasting love." [Jeremiah 31:3] Already in eternity, God had his plan of salvation intact, and through the Savior, his loving eye was on you. He recognized you as his own in Christ. That is why the Bible makes timeless statements like: "The Lord knows those who are his." [II Timothy 2:19] "The Lord knows the way of the righteous." [Psalm 1:6] Jesus says to unbelievers, "I never knew you." [Matthew 7:23] And Jesus assures his people, "I know my sheep." [John 10:14]

God has an eternal purpose for you, and he works for the good of those who love him. God's working for our good began, not when we were born, but way back in eternity. When God created the world, he was thinking of you, Dawson. As his mighty hand guided every event that has taken place on earth, he had his loving eye on you. In all things God has worked for your good, thinking of you, foreknowing you, loving you as his own.

And what did God in love do for us? He predestined us. "For those God foreknew, he also predestined." Now what does that mean? Before High School graduation, quite often the students will write up class prophecies -- what they think the destiny of each graduate will be. Sometimes these are humorous, and quite often they don't come true. At class reunions it's fun to look over these class prophecies, and see how close or far off they were.

In eternity God set a prophesy for you and for me. And when God sets a prophesy, it always comes true, it must come true. He set our destiny. He predestined us. And what was that destiny? God predestined us "to be conformed to the likeness of his Son." God predestined us to be made like Christ, perfect and holy like Christ, serving

God in righteousness and purity forever. We can be perfect and holy like Christ only through his perfection that he won for us by his perfect life in our place, and only through the forgiveness of sins that he won for us by his bitter suffering and death on the cross. This likeness of Christ has already begun in us through faith, and it will be complete when we are in heaven. I John 3:2 assures us that in heaven, "We shall be like him."

God destined us to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Since we are like God's One and Only Son, that makes us also God's sons, or Jesus' brothers. Jesus more than once calls his disciples his brothers, and more than once the Bible calls our risen Jesus the "firstborn from the dead." [Colossians 1:18, Revelation 1:5]

From eternity God predestined us to be Christians, to be Jesus' brothers, to be his own dear children. Ephesians 1:4-7a tells us: "God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ....In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins." In II Thessalonians 2:13 we read, "From the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth." II Timothy 1:9 says, "This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time." And in Matthew 25:34 we hear how Christ will say to us on the last day, "Take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world."

It's not just an accident that we're Christians. There are no such things as accidents or chance happenings in our lives, or in the events of this world. The world doesn't run by the principal, "Whatever will be will be," but rather, God guides all things. "And in all things God works for the good of those who love him." God has an eternal purpose for you. He predestined you to be a Christian. Each day of your life was planned by God in eternity. He has guided world events and the events of your life so that you would be "conformed to the likeness of his Son."

Yet when we were born into this world, we were not Christians. We were not God's children. Instead we were separated from him in sin, spiritually blind, spiritually dead, enemies of God. God had to miraculously bring us to himself. "Those he predestined, he also called." When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, he called him. "Jesus called in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!'" And by the power of God's word, Lazarus' dead ears heard, and he came out of the grave. So God has miraculously called us. He has called us to come out of our sin and death, and turn to him for forgiveness and salvation. God has called us to himself by proclaiming his word to us, and sending the Holy Spirit into our hearts to work the miracle of faith through that word. For most of us, this took place when we were baptized as infants. God called us, and that's when our relationship with God began, when he caused us to begin to love him. Remember, God has had a loving relationship with us since before the creation of the world.

If your parents were Christians and brought you to be baptized, that was no accident. If a friend first spoke God's word to you, no matter what the situation was, it was no accident. It was no accident that true Christianity came to this country. It was no accident that our congregations began. It is no accident that I am in this church today, or that you are in this church today. God has guided events to call us to faith, and he also sees to it that we remain in faith. I Corinthians 1:8,9 says, "God will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful." Sometimes we

wonder how certain troubles in our life can serve our good, but God often uses difficulties to draw us closer to himself, to cause us to look to him and to keep us in faith. Often we find that those who have suffered the greatest hardships are the strongest Christians, trusting alone in their Lord. God has an eternal purpose for you. In all things he works for the good of those who love him.

Before God called us, we were lost and condemned sinners, criminals who had broken God's law in every way. In and of ourselves, we were detestable to God. At the same time God called us to himself, he also did something else for us. "Those he called, he also justified." We were guilty sinners, but God declared us not guilty, innocent, declared us just or righteous, justified us. How can God declare us sinners righteous? It is only because Jesus lived a righteous life in our place, and took away our sins on the cross. By working repentance and faith in our hearts, the Holy Spirit makes Christ's righteousness our own, so that when God looks at us through Christ, he sees us as just, righteous and holy. God uses the events of our lives, especially sickness, hardships, troubles and loss to remind us that by ourselves we are sinful, so that we constantly repent of our sins, and receive Christ's forgiveness and remain justified.

"Those he justified, he also glorified." To be glorified means to be lifted up and exalted, to be honored and made great. Jesus was glorified when he descended into hell and proclaimed his victory over the devil; when he rose from the dead, proclaiming his victory over sin and death. He was glorified when he ascended into heaven, and now as he sits at the right hand of God the Father, the position of all power and authority. And he will be glorified on the Last Day, when he judges all people. Remember, Jesus is our brother. We were destined to be conformed to his likeness. And we also share in his glory. His glory is our glory. It belongs to us as Christians already now, but we won't fully experience this glory until the last day, when we are rid of sin, death and the devil, when our bodies are raised and glorified, and we reign with Jesus in heavenly splendor for all eternity. "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father." [Matthew 13:43]

God has an eternal purpose for us. Our problems and troubles here on earth are nothing compared to the eternal glory that is ours, and God uses our very problems and troubles to safely bring us to that glory. The Apostle Paul says elsewhere, "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." [II Corinthians 4:17,18]

Notice how God has done it all. He foreknew you. He predestined you. He called you. He justified you. He glorified and will glorify you. God has totally carried out our salvation, and we have done nothing, and can do nothing to contribute to our salvation. God has an eternal purpose for you, Dawson. Don't get so bogged down with the troubles of today that you forget that from eternity God has been guiding all events for your good, and he has prepared an eternity of glory for you. Surely he is also working for your good today.

Amen.

May he who began a good work in you carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ. Amen.