

Main Idea: In Romans 8:28-30 we come face to face with the promise that produces secure sufferers. It is the promise of a good outcome. If we're in Christ, we can be sure of a good outcome in two areas.

- I. There will be a good outcome in our suffering (28a).
 - A. We know that suffering is inevitable in this age.
 - B. We know that God is in control of all things.
 - 1. He is sovereign over what comes into our lives.
 - 2. He is good in His intent for our lives.
 - 3. He is wise in the way He orchestrates the details of our lives.
 - C. We know that God is at work in our lives.
 - 1. Nothing can ultimately harm God's people.
 - 2. Nothing can hinder God's plan.
- II. There will be a good outcome in our salvation (28b-30).
 - A. God has a people (28).
 - 1. They are called by God.
 - 2. They love God.
 - B. God has a purpose (29).
 - 1. His aim is to exalt His Son.
 - 2. His aim is to form a people like His Son.
 - C. God has a plan (30).
 - 1. Our salvation involves a completed past work.
 - 2. Our salvation involves a completed present work.
 - 3. Our salvation involves a completed future work.

Make It Personal: What should we do with this promise?

- 1. Learn it.
- 2. Live in light of it, especially when the hard times come.
- 3. Love God for it.

Scripture Memory Song ("Redeemed people sing the Word"): Psalm 67:3, 5

It's our privilege to return to our journey through what is perhaps the greatest chapter in the Bible, Romans 8, and today to open what is perhaps the greatest text in the Bible. Okay, that's an unprovable overstatement. But I know the text before us ranks towards the top of the most influential passages in my life.

Back in 1983 during my second year of Greek my senior year at Cedarville College, we were asked to pick a text to exegete for our final project. This is the text I chose. I've been thinking about it ever since, and have preached it more than once. There's always more to see. The passage is Romans 8:28-30 and today's message is entitled, "*The Promise That Produces Secure Sufferers*."

Scripture Reading: Romans 8:28-30

The book *Running for My Life: One Lost Boy's Journey from the Killing Fields of Sudan to the Olympic Games* tells the true story of Lopez Lomong. I'd like to take a few minutes to tell his story because it's a powerful illustration of the passage we'll be considering today.

Lopez was only six years old when soldiers invaded a church service and stole him from his parents, who of course tried to save him, but were powerless to prevent the men with the guns from taking him, throwing him into the back of a covered truck, and speeding away. The kidnappers planned on turning him into a child-soldier, but he was too small, so they left him in a hut, essentially to die.

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the Romans 8 series preached at WBC in 1995. Also, see the 2012 series "Promises to Live By in the Crucible of Suffering".

One night three weeks later, three older boys invited him to try and escape with them, promising him they would take him home. And so, while the guards were looking the other way, they fled their hut and ran for their lives. They ran all night long, hid during the day, ran all night long a second night, and then a third. Unfortunately, these Sudanese boys were running in the wrong direction, and were captured, this time by the Kenyan border guards, and placed in Kakuma, a refugee camp in Kenya.

Lopez spent the next ten years in that refugee camp. In his own words, “Kakuma was created as a temporary place where displaced people would be safe until the war in Sudan ended. Today, twenty years later, fifty thousand people not only from Sudan but also from Somalia, Ethiopia, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Uganda, and Rwanda call Kakuma home.”²

In Kakuma, Lopez lived in a tent called “camp section 58” with ten other boys. They ate one meal a day, some grain. “Tuesdays were the high point of our week, the one day we ate well,” says Lopez, “the day we ate garbage.”³

“On Sunday we went to church instead of school. It was my favorite day of the week. Everything was good on Sundays. I didn’t have to think about food or anything else. Instead, I lost myself singing praises to God. I knew He was there with me. I never, ever doubted that fact for a moment.”⁴

One day he was feeling sorry for himself, and a friend in the refugee camp told him, “You cannot sit and wish for something that is never going to happen, or you will lose your mind. No, you must focus on here and now. Do your chores. Go to school. Keep your mind busy. The past is gone. It will not come back. You must live in this day.”⁵

Pretty wise counsel, wouldn’t you say? Especially coming from a mere boy in a refugee camp. Lopez took the counsel to heart, and developed a new perspective. “What is the point of such complaining?” he writes. “After all the whining and complaining is over, you still live in a refugee camp. All the complaining in the world will not make your life any better. Instead, you must choose to make the best of whatever the situation in which you find yourself, even in a place like Kakuma.”⁶

The highlight of the day for Lopez and his friends was playing soccer. But since there were so many boys that wanted to play, the older boys made a rule. You have to run around the camp before you can play. That’s 18 miles. And so Lopez ran it, every day, 18 miles, just so he could then play soccer.

About this point as you’re reading the book you might find yourself thinking, “What a terrible thing for a little boy to endure! Being taken from his family in Sudan, running for his life to escape the soldiers only to end up in refugee camp in Kenya, being forced to run just so he could play soccer? What a meaningless string of cruel and haphazard circumstances!”

² Lomong, Lopez (2012-07-17). *Running for My Life: One Lost Boy's Journey from the Killing Fields of Sudan to the Olympic Games* (p. 35). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

³ Lomong, Lopez (2012-07-17). *Running for My Life: One Lost Boy's Journey from the Killing Fields of Sudan to the Olympic Games* (p. 38). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

⁴ Lomong, Lopez (2012-07-17). *Running for My Life: One Lost Boy's Journey from the Killing Fields of Sudan to the Olympic Games* (p. 42). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

⁵ Lomong, Lopez (2012-07-17). *Running for My Life: One Lost Boy's Journey from the Killing Fields of Sudan to the Olympic Games* (p. 44). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

⁶ Lomong, Lopez (2012-07-17). *Running for My Life: One Lost Boy's Journey from the Killing Fields of Sudan to the Olympic Games* (p. 39). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

I say *might* find yourself thinking that *if*. If you didn't know the promise of God that we're going to consider this morning in Romans 8:28-30. Actually, there's nothing haphazard at all about the life of Lopez Lomong, nor about your life and mine. I'll tell you what happened to Lopez a little later, but first I want us to consider carefully the amazing promise that his life illustrates, *the promise that produces secure sufferers*.

My friends, the Bible you hold teaches that God is sovereign, meaning He is in absolute control of everything that happens in His universe. But He's not just in control of everything. He orchestrates everything to accomplish His good plan. Do you believe that? God's sovereignty is not a dry, abstract doctrine applicable only to theologians tucked away in some seminary library. The truth of God's sovereignty can change our whole perspective on life, especially when it gets hard.

According to Romans 8:28-30, we can be sure of a good outcome in two areas. This is God's promise to all who are in Christ, and it produces secure sufferers.

I. There will be a good outcome in our suffering (28a).

Verse 28 begins, "And we know." Stop there. Who is *we*? Paul is writing, and he is speaking in behalf of people he calls "saints" in verse 27, a term that identifies people whom God has set apart and are in a saving relationship with His Son. "We know" is used five times in Romans. In verse 26 Paul confessed that sometimes Christians DON'T KNOW what to pray, and that we should pray anyway because the Spirit will help us, and the Father KNOWS the mind of the Spirit (27). Now we're told, "We know."

What do we know? According to verse 28, we can be sure of three realities pertaining to our suffering. "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose (ESV)."

A. We know that suffering is inevitable in this age. Everyone suffers. We know this. The first century Jews viewed knew this and viewed history as comprised of two ages: this age, and the coming age. This age is characterized by suffering, while the age to come (which will be inaugurated by the entrance of the Messiah) will be known for glory.

We see this truth developed earlier in Romans 8. For instance, Paul contrasts the suffering and glory in verse 17, and says, "If indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." We see the same dual-age-contrast in verse 18, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

So we are living in an age of suffering. We see the word "groan" again and again in the previous section. Creation is groaning like a mother in labor, says Paul in verse 22. Indeed, suffering is inevitable in this age. There's a second reality we know.

B. We know that God is in control of all things. And that includes our suffering. The Creator God is not a wimpy God. In fact, there are three things about Him that will sustain our lives during the inevitable times of suffering.

1. *He is sovereign over what comes into our lives.* In total control. Therefore, no mistakes. No accidents. No out of control situations.

2. *He is good in His intent for our lives.* God is good and whatever God does is good. His intent for our lives is good. More about His good intent in a moment.

3. *He is wise in the way He orchestrates the details of our lives.* He is like a craftsman weaving a beautiful tapestry. He doesn't just use the bright, beautiful colors, but weaves in the blacks and dark blues and deep grays. He knows the finished

product He's heading for, and in His wisdom He twists into our lives what's needed to bring about the glorious end result.

When we're in the middle of a dark season of life, we'll find occasion to question those three divine attributes. Is God really sovereign? Is He really good? Is He really wise? But it's then that we must, by faith, affirm what we do not feel and cannot see. Lord God, You are sovereign, good, and wise.

There's a third reality we know and it's this.

C. We know that God is at work in our lives. "All things work together for good," says the ESV. But things don't just *work*. There is a worker. As the NIV says, "And we know that in all things God *works*." God is not just in control. He is at work. And He is not just at work in the big scheme of things in His universe. He is at work *in our lives*.

No verse in the Bible makes this more clear than Romans 8:28. The late Dr. Reuben A. Torrey called this verse "a soft pillow for a tired heart."⁷ A lot of us have put our heads on the pillow of Romans 8:28, haven't we? "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Before delving into what this verse is saying, allow me to point out what it is *not* saying. Romans 8:28 does not say that all things are good. This is not an endorsement of a stoic approach to life. Evil is not good. When a drunk driver maims a child for life, that is not good. When a stepfather molests a helpless little one, that is not good. Dying of terminal cancer is not good. These are horrible consequences of living in a sin-cursed world.

Yet know this. Even though these events may not be good, Romans 8:28 says that they can work together for good. What does that mean? It means we can make two affirmations.

1. *Nothing can ultimately harm God's people.* Again, Paul says, "*WE* know." This verse is not speaking to non-Christians, though God is certainly sovereign over the affairs of their lives too. But we who know Christ know something. We know that nothing ultimately can harm us. We know who we are and where we are going. We are God's people. Even death cannot really harm us, for death is merely the door to our eternal glory. That's why when Paul himself was facing possible execution, he could testify, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is GAIN (Phil 1:21)."

Since God is in control, nothing can ultimately harm God's people. This promise also leads us to a second affirmation.

2. *Nothing can hinder God's plan.* Paul explains what that plan is in verse 29, as we'll see in a moment, but the essence of the plan is this. God's plan is to exalt His Son by forming a people that resemble His Son. Here's what is staggering. God is great enough to use what He hates to accomplish what He loves. It's true. He uses even tragic circumstances to accomplish His good plan. He did this for His own Son (look at the cross for the ultimate example), and He does the same for us. All things work together for good for the people of God.

Joseph affirmed this. Remember his story? This young man lost the prime years of his life when his jealous brothers sold him into slavery. Then he lost his reputation when he was unjustly framed by Potiphar's wife and ended up spending years in prison for a crime he had not committed. Tragic? Yes.

⁷ McGee, p. 156.

But do you remember what Joseph himself said about his ordeal? Later in life, when speaking to his guilty brothers, he said this to them in Genesis 50:19-20, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me [the KJV says, "You thought evil against me"] but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

That's key. Joseph called what his brothers did *evil*. But he also says that God had a good purpose for allowing it. *For we know that all things work together for good.*

Beloved, we are living in an age filled with suffering, yet this is bedrock biblical truth. God is in sovereign control of our suffering. Let that sink in. Do you have scars in your life from past hurt? We all do, if we're honest. And this means we have a choice to make. We can be bitter and angry towards the world, towards people, and even towards God. Or, we can embrace Romans 8:28. We can say, "O Sovereign God, I humbly confess that You are in control. You are so great that You can use even my pain to advance Your plan. I choose to trust You today."

Job lost ten children and nearly all of his possessions. Yet while sitting in a pile of ashes with boils all over his body he could say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him (Job 13:15)." Job chose to *trust* God.

In early May 1954, a drunk driver went left of center and hit another car just a few miles from here. In the back seat was a young high school senior, Nancy Rae Litteral, a member of WBC. Nancy's neck was broken and she became a quadriplegic. Her plans had been to graduate, go to a Christian college in the fall, eventually get married and have a family. But that all changed in a split second. She had no control over her limbs from the neck down.

She nearly died. Then she wished she had died. But in time she began to see the hand of God in what she was facing. Nancy tells the story as follows:

I spent a year at University Hospital for rehabilitation. While there I began painting with number paints. When I came home, I started sketching and painting on my own. In 1962 I took a three-year art course from "Famous Artists School" by correspondence. Soon I started showing my paintings at local art shows.

I had not sketched or painted before my accident so felt it was a miracle from God that I could paint, and so pledged Him that any profits I made from painting would go to His work and charity. [she eventually supported her own brother, Bob and Shirley Litteral, who took the gospel to the Angors in PNG]

After painting by hand for twenty-five years, arthritis came in my elbow, so in 1980 I started painting by mouth with a special mouth apparatus that protects my teeth. Now I can paint for hours without difficulty.

In 1983, I became a member of the "Association of Handicapped Artists." To belong, one must paint by mouth or foot. They reproduce the art work of handicapped artists on cards and calendars.

My desire is to bring honor and glory to God through my art, and through my life be a witness to others that with God's help--no matter what the handicap or circumstances--one can still have a happy, satisfying, and meaningful life."

Nancy Rae Litteral is no longer painting by mouth. In 2006, after more than fifty years of navigating life in a wheelchair, the Lord called her into His presence. She is now in heaven enjoying the Savior she so loved. By the way, Nancy's life verse was Romans 8:28.

Friends, there will be tragedies we'll never fully understand this side of glory, yet the promise of Romans 8:28 remains true. There are no accidents, no surprises with God. And because of that we can be sure that there will be a good outcome in our suffering.

But that's not all. We can be sure of a good outcome in second area as well.

II. There will be a good outcome in our salvation (28b-30).

Paul identifies this outcome in verses 29-30, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."

Unfortunately, though we receive great comfort in knowing that God is sovereign over our suffering, some people are threatened by the suggestion that He is sovereign in our salvation. So before we even look at the next section of verses, I want to lay on the table three potential responses.

One is *pride*. I well remember seeing how some classmates in college responded when they first learned that God is sovereign in our salvation. They became smug and haughty, and looked down on others who didn't know the truth they'd just learned. The problem wasn't with the doctrine they learned, but with their proud hearts.

A second potential response is *denial*. Some will see what the Bible says, and think, "I don't care what it says. I don't think it's fair. It doesn't make sense to me so I refuse to believe in election and predestination." That's unfortunate. I agree with the assessment of a radio Bible teacher who's now in heaven, J. Vernon McGee, who said, "This is not a frightful doctrine; it is a wonderful doctrine."⁸

That brings us to the third potential response, which is humble, grateful, and joyful *acceptance*. Is God good? I don't have to figure Him out to know He is. Is His Word good? Certainly, even if my finite little mind can't process it entirely. We must never be afraid of doctrine, nor should we ever apologize for God's truth. It's good. We must humbly and gratefully accept what God says, no more, no less.

With that said, let's investigate the text. We're going to draw three conclusions from this text pertaining to the good outcome in our salvation. God has a people, a purpose, and a plan.

A. God has a people (28). Notice how Paul describes Christians in verse 28 (NIV), "To them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Paul gives us two characteristics of God's people. One highlights God's sovereignty. The other highlights human responsibility in salvation.

1. *They are called by God.* "Who have been called according to his purpose [KJV 'who are the called according to his purpose]." The Bible teaches that God extends a general call to all people to be saved. For instance, Jesus says in Matthew 11:28, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." This is a call for all to come, sometime's referred to as God's *general* call.

But God also extends a special, effectual call, and this is what Paul has in mind in Romans 8. Christians are those who have been "called" by God. Paul specifies who receives this calling in verse 30, "And those he predestined, he also called." The apostle used this term to identify the readers of this letter as he began back in Romans 1:6, 7, "And you also are among those who are *called* to belong to Jesus Christ. To all in Rome who are loved by God and *called* to be saints."

⁸ McGee, p. 161.

According to 1 Corinthians 1:23-24, there are three categories of people in the world. “But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews [category #1], and foolishness to Gentiles [category #2], but to those whom God has *called* [category #3], both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” Once again, *called* here refers to God’s special and effectual call. It’s referring to a people that, though they don’t deserve it, have been chosen by God (that’s the term Paul uses in Romans 8:33, “those whom God has chosen,” also called “the elect” in other passages) and therefore *called* by God. And these whom God has chosen and called are “born from above” into the family of God (John 1:13).

Paul identifies a second characteristic of God's people in verse 28. The first pertains to God’s sovereignty. The second pertains to man’s responsibility.

2. *They love God.* “All things work for the good *of those who love him.*” Here we see man's response. Those whom God calls respond with love and devotion to His gracious call. A true Christian is a person who loves God. The essence of the Christian life is loving God.

You ask, “How then is a person saved?” The Bible answers this question from two perspectives and in this verse we see both. The Bible emphasizes both the sovereign choice of God and the subsequent response of individuals. Christians are those who have been called by God and in turn love God. God's sovereignty and human responsibility, both are involved in our salvation.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, that great preacher from the past century, was once asked if he could reconcile these two truths to each other. He replied, “I wouldn't try. I never reconcile friends.”⁹ Friends? Yes, friends.

J. I. Packer, in his helpful book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, explains, “In the Bible, divine sovereignty and human responsibility are not enemies. They are not uneasy neighbours; they are not in an endless state of cold war with each other. They are *friends*, and they work together.”¹⁰

This brings us to a second conclusion. First, God has a people. But why?

B. God has a purpose (29). Specifically, God has a purpose in mind for the people He calls to Himself. What is that purpose? He has two aims in mind according to the explanation given in verse 29.

1. *His aim is to exalt His Son.* Verse 29 begins, “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image [NIV ‘likeness’] of His Son.” God's purpose is to exalt His Son, yet in a very specific way. How has God chosen to exalt His Son? In this manner.

2. *His aim is to form a people like His Son.* Don’t miss the purpose clause at the end of verse 29, “*That* he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” There’s God’s agenda. It’s why He chose you and me, brothers and sisters. He wants us individually and collectively to look like His Son, Jesus the Christ.

And here’s where the “all things” of Romans 8:28 comes in. Did Jesus suffer? Yes. Did He experience injustice and pain and hardship? Yes. So if we’re going to resemble Jesus, we’re going to experience some of the things He experienced.

Granted, we’ll never experience the fullness of what He encountered. He didn’t just suffer. He endured infinite suffering on the cross, as He took our place and endured the penalty we deserved to pay for our sins. We’re not saved by our suffering, but by

⁹ Taken from J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 35.

¹⁰ Packer, pp. 35-36.

believing in His. “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:9).”

But once saved, once we’ve become God’s child, we can be sure of God’s intent to use all things to transform us into the likeness of His Son. And this brings us to our third conclusion, which comes out of verse 30.

C. God has a plan (30). I need to point out to you that all the verbs in verse 30 are aorist tense in the Greek, and that means they depict past tense activities. These are actions that have already been completed in the plan of God. Our salvation involves three completed works.

1. Our salvation involves a completed past work. Verse 30 states, “And those whom he predestined he also called.”

In His all-knowing mind, before He ever created the universe, God foreknew and predestined a people that His Son would save and who would then become like His Son. And those He predestined, He called. Nothing can stand in the way of the fulfillment of God’s salvation plan.

Please notice from verse 28 that we are called according to God’s *purpose*, not according to His foreknowledge. Some say that God chose His people because He foreknew what they would do. But that’s not what this text says, nor other texts. This passage says God called a people according to His purpose. Romans 8 doesn’t talk about *what* God foreknew, but rather *whom* He foreknew.

You say, “I still don’t understand.” Okay, let’s look at another passage written by Paul. In 2 Timothy 1:9, the apostle contemplates the sovereign work of God in salvation and says, “Who has saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but *according to His own purpose and grace*, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.”

Years ago there was a boy down south that wanted to join a church. The deacons examined him and asked, “How did you get saved?” His answer was, “God did His part, and I did my part.” They thought something was wrong with his doctrine so they questioned him further. “What was God’s part and what was your part?” His explanation was a good one. “God’s part was the saving, and my part was the sinning. I done run from Him as fast as my sinful heart and rebellious legs could take me. He done took out after me till he run me down.”¹¹

Our salvation involves a completed past work. But there’s more.

2. Our salvation involves a completed present work. Verse 30 continues, “And those whom He called He also justified.” God justified (meaning He *declared righteous*) those whom He called. Justification is the theme of Romans 1-5 where we learn that God justifies a sinner the moment he or she places his or her faith in Christ and His finished work on the cross. This is the completed *present* work of salvation. We were predestined by God. We are now justified by God.

3. Our salvation involves a completed future work. The end of verse 30 tells us, “And those whom he justified he also glorified.” When you think about it, this is astounding. From our perspective, glorification is future. I don’t look glorified, not yet, and neither do you. My body is still groaning. Sin is still a present foe. Yet in God’s all-knowing mind, it’s as if we are already glorified. If we have been justified, we are also glorified for He sees the outcome of it all.

¹¹ Story told by McGee, 159.

You say, “Okay, what about sanctification? Why isn’t sanctification mentioned in this verse?” E. F. Harrison suggests, “It is probably left out deliberately because sanctification is the one area in which human cooperation is essential.”¹²

Think about it. God predestinated. God called. God justified. God glorified. We didn’t contribute to those activities. They are God’s alone. He is the subject. But when it comes to sanctification (living a life of holiness), the Bible calls for our cooperation and obedience. We are secure *strugglers*.

So God has a people, a purpose for those people, and a plan to bring it all about. What’s that mean for us? It means that if we’ve been saved, we can be sure of a good outcome, in our present suffering and ultimately in our eternal salvation. God doesn’t do things half way. What God starts, God finishes.

This is the promise of God, the promise that produces secure sufferers.

At this beginning of this message I told you about Lopez Lomong and left you hanging as he was running 18 miles a day around his refugee camp just to earn the right to play soccer. A meaningless cruelty? No. In the end, our sovereign, good, and wise God used it to save his life.

One night in the year 2000, Lopez ventured outside the camp to local farmer’s house where he saw a black and white television connected to a car battery. The owner told him that for the price of five shillings, he could watch the Olympics. He had no idea what the Olympics were, he said, but he knew it involved running. So he paid the money, the only coin he had, and there on the screen he saw a man named Michael Johnson with the letters USA on his shirt, with thousands of people cheering him on. What first impressed Lopez was that this man had the same skin color. What next impressed him was his speed as he won the 400 meter dash. But what most impressed him was what he did when took the stand to receive his medal.

“Michael Johnson did something African men never do,” said Lopez. “He wept openly and without shame. I shook my head in disbelief and leaned closer to the screen. Why was he crying? I wondered. How can a man like this, a man who just won an Olympic gold medal, show such emotion? In my culture, such a display was a sign of weakness. Yet Michael Johnson had just proven his strength and confidence to the world. Why, then, did he cry?”¹³

“For a man to react to winning a race in such a manner told me that this had been more than a race. Those letters on his chest and the flag he carried around the track, they had to be the key. Clearly, he was not just running for himself. The gold medal by itself was not enough to bring a real man to tears. No, this man, this man with skin like mine, ran for something bigger than himself. That had to be why he wept.”¹⁴

As Lopez walked back to his Kenyan refugee camp that night, he couldn’t shake what he had just seen. He says, “Suddenly, an idea hatched in my brain, an idea that should have struck me as ridiculous, but it did not. To me, this idea made perfect sense. In my mind’s eye I watched Michael Johnson run his race over and over again and I knew that someday, I, too, would run in the Olympics. I did not know how, but I knew I would. I now had a dream that changed the course of my life: I would be an Olympian.

¹² Harrison, p. 98.

¹³ Lomong, Lopez (2012-07-17). *Running for My Life: One Lost Boy’s Journey from the Killing Fields of Sudan to the Olympic Games* (pp. 55-56). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

¹⁴ Lomong, Lopez (2012-07-17). *Running for My Life: One Lost Boy’s Journey from the Killing Fields of Sudan to the Olympic Games* (p. 56). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

Moreover, I wanted to run with those same three letters across my chest: USA. I wanted to be like Michael Johnson.”¹⁵

And then Lopez made this incredible statement, “God Himself had brought me to Kakuma. I always thought He must have had a reason for bringing me here. Now I had it. Now I knew where my destiny lay. Michael Johnson opened a wider world to me. By God’s grace, I would get there.”¹⁶

You’ll have to read the book to find out how it happened, but I will tell you this. Just eight years later in 2008, not only did Lopez run, but he was selected by the rest of the American Olympic team to carry the American flag into the Olympic stadium in Beijing.

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

Make It Personal: What should we do with this promise?

I urge you to take action in three ways with Romans 8:28-30.

1. *Learn it.* Start by putting it on a 3x5 card and reading it every day, and don’t stop until it’s found a home in your heart. Learn this promise. Remind yourself of it regularly.

2. *Live in light of it, especially when the hard times come.* When you’re in the midst of a challenging time, affirm what God says regardless how you feel. Do it even now, if you’re struggling. Say, “Lord, I affirm that You are working together all things, even painful things, for my ultimate good, so that I will resemble my Savior and Your beloved Son. And for I thank You.”

3. *Love God for it.* Express to Him your thanks and devotion and worship for how He is working out His good plan in your life. We don’t deserve it, dear friends, but because of His amazing grace, we are forever His, and He is intent on transforming us so we are prepared for His eternal presence. There are a million reasons why we should love Him, and here’s yet another. He has given us the promise of a good outcome, indeed, the promise that produces security in this midst of our suffering.

Closing Song: #350 “’Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus” (all four verses)

This afternoon: *Community groups*

Community Group Discussion:

1. In Romans 8:28-30 we come face to face with the promise that produces secure sufferers. Take time to read the passage together and then discuss the following. What is the promise? In other words, what can we know for sure according to Romans 8:28-30?
2. The promise of Romans 8:28-30 can be misused. How so? Give some examples.
3. What do we learn about suffering from verses 28-29? How has God uses these verses in your life in the past?
4. What do we learn about salvation from verses 29-30? After discussing this question, take a closer look at the verbs that describe God’s activity in our salvation. What are the verbs? What activities did God do for us in the past and how should this knowledge affect us in the present?
5. According to this passage, what is God’s purpose in our salvation? Why did He choose to save us?
6. How might your life be different this week if you leaned into the promise of Romans 8:28-30? After sharing, spend time as a group praying in light of this promise.

¹⁵ Lomong, Lopez (2012-07-17). *Running for My Life: One Lost Boy’s Journey from the Killing Fields of Sudan to the Olympic Games* (pp. 56-58). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

¹⁶ Lomong, Lopez (2012-07-17). *Running for My Life: One Lost Boy’s Journey from the Killing Fields of Sudan to the Olympic Games* (p. 58). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.