

“How to survive?” Romans 8:28-39

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 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. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

My pastor often used to remind us that Christian faith is the most practical thing that there is. Not only does it give life, true life, eternal life, but it also helps us to lead our lives well here at this age. And today we are blessed to reflect on one of the most practical parts of the New Testament. Incredibly practical.

There is this brief and funny saying: “Life is hard and then you die.” It may not be a perfect summary of our existence, but there is some truth in it. There are those certainties of life that none of us can escape. And one of them is suffering.

When experiences of this life painfully remind us that we are sinful beings living in a fallen world. Whatever your lot is. Health afflictions, relationship problems, material struggles, tragic accidents, betrayal, injustice, loneliness, and so on and on.

To clarify, we are not referring to self-inflicted afflictions which are obvious consequences of our foolish choices and sinful actions. We are referring to those painful situations which seem to come at us out of blue. Brutal, violent, nonsensical, tearing our very lives apart.

Besides, for us, Christians, there is more on top of what everyone faces in their lives. Spiritual hardship. “You will be hated for my name's sake,” thus Jesus. Ongoing battle between old Adam and new creation in Christ in us. The Devil who prowls around seeking to devour us. Crosses that are laid on us because of our Christian faith. Thank you, Lord!

It is in this not so pleasant reality of our lives where the Holy Spirit speaks through Paul the apostle. What He gives us is nothing less than God’s own Survival Kit for His beloved children, where He Himself supplies what is necessary for us to survive and to continue.

July 26th, 2026

I can testify from my personal experience in such very challenging times that Christian faith, and this God-given Survival Kit are incredibly practical, incredibly helpful. I pray that you not only learn about it but embrace it as your own.

Three items for your survival. **First, this Survival Kit contains realistic expectations for this life. Second, it provides for us protection from accusations of the evil one. Third, it supplies the source of extraordinary strengths that comes from the Triune God Himself.**

First, realistic expectations. You may have heard how this verse is misused in some Christian circles. **“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”**

Too often it is made to mean this, that if you are a Christian, then everything will be fine in your life, smooth sailing, or at least that everything that happens in your life is good in one way or another. God’s plan for you. I guess our itching ears like to hear sweet lies like that.

But that is not what Paul is saying. Earlier in his letter to Romans, he provides a context for this encouraging verse. That context is our inevitable suffering in this age where not only us, but entire creation is subject to corruption and longs to be renewed.

More, as we heard today, Paul actually provides a nice list of things we can expect to face in this life. **“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?”**

Paul speaks not only led by the Spirit, but also from his own extensive experience. You can read in his second letter to Corinthians a summary of Paul’s life, and it is about all those things and all those things in abundance. More than any of us will ever have to endure.

Our stories are different. We may want to thank our gracious Lord Jesus that our lives are not as dramatic as it was for Paul the apostle, but we all have to endure our share of sufferings, no escaping that, and as I mentioned, as Christians at times we may be tested more than someone who is not of God’s own household.

We will do well, we will be well equipped if we have a realistic view of this fallen world, on the spiritual battle where we are involved, and if we have realistic expectations. That will make us grounded in truth, not misguided by false dreams.

When we find ourselves in the midst of suffering, we are vulnerable. The order and peace of good life is gone, we struggle to make sense, we may find ourselves exposed to forces of chaos and easy prey of the evil one. For such situations this God-given Survival Kit provides for us protection against the accusations of the evil one.

Second item, protection against the evil one. When our life is disrupted, when we feel that ground may be disappearing beneath us, our own sinful nature rushes to sink us even deeper into misery. The feelings of guilt and shame and blame will surface.

The evil one will be quick to use them to torture and destroy us. “This is all your fault! This is happening because of what you did, and because of what you failed to do. This is happening because you are just not good enough. You are worthless! It is God punishing

July 26th, 2026

you for you don't deserve anything good. Remember all your sins and failures! Remember what a failure you are!" And the reality of suffering in our lives seems to confirm the accusations of the evil one. That makes his accusations so convincing and impactful. He attacks our identity as God's beloved children, and He attacks God the Father's gracious and favorable attitude towards you.

Against all the cunning lies and accusations of the evil one, the Holy Spirit declares: **"Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"**

This is what you need to hear. This is your protection! This is the message that this Survival Kit brings to you. This is what you need to proclaim to yourself or your loved ones when facing challenging times. Suffering is inevitable, but they are not signs of God's anger at you. That is not the Father's voice that accuses and shames you.

Who shall bring any charge against God's people? Who is to condemn you? These are not rhetorical questions. Paul uses them to assure you that if God has justified you, and Jesus Christ, who died for you and was raised and now sits at the right hand of God, is interceding for you, there is no one who has the power to charge or condemn you. No one!

Let those disheartening voices keep silent! They have no say where the Triune God has spoken and given His verdict. "You are my beloved child, and with you I am well pleased!" This is what you need to repeat to yourself whatever happens.

But then there is more. The third item. **This God-given Survival Kit contains extraordinary strength that helps you to stand head lifted high up even amid any suffering.** What is this strength? Where does it come from? From knowing the Father's loving heart and His gracious attitude towards you. Not just knowing intellectually but trusting His promises with your whole being.

When suffering happens in your life, remind yourself of these words: **"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"** This is called argument from the greater.

God is for you! Who can be against you?! For God did not spare His Son but gave Him up for you! When you were still His enemies. If He did that, this greater thing, how will He not give you all things, which is such an incomparably smaller thing! God didn't spare His Son for you... What greater assurance can we imagine for His favor towards us?!

"We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." The Bible teaches that God is not the source of evil in this world, nor of our suffering. But... He is the Lord over all!

He is the Lord and Master also over every evil, over everything that causes us suffering. And being the Lord and Master, He commands even these things, all things to work together for good for those whom He has called.

July 26th, 2026

There is something so contra-intuitive, so challenging, but also at the same time so comforting and assuring. The Spirit declares that God knew you, He chose you, He called you, He justified you and He wants to conform you to the image of His Son.

To make you like His Son. Our Book of Concord summarizes it this way: “[Paul] **explains that God in His purpose has ordained before the time of the world by what crosses and sufferings He would conform every one of His elect to the image of His Son. His cross shall and must work together for good for everyone, because they are called according to God’s purpose.**” [FC, XI, SD, 49]

Did you hear this?! God has ordained before the time of the world by what crosses and sufferings He would conform you to the Image of His Son. That’s right. For Jesus too **“learned obedience and [was made perfect] through what He suffered”**. [Heb 5:8-9]

Your Father in heaven uses everything, all things, to conform you to the Image of His Son. Whatever happens in your life, remember this! God who gave His Son for you, when you didn’t even know Him, He will use everything, even the most unbearable things in your life to work together for good for you.

Because He has chosen you, He has called you, He has justified you, He is conforming you to the image of His Son and He will glorify you. This is what gives strength to God’s children. God’s presence with us in the midst of our suffering, that enables us not only to survive, but to continue despite all worldly odds.

Whatever happens, keep reminding yourself of this and pray: “Dear Father, you see what is happening, you see how unbearably difficult this is for me, please, let me experience Your presence, show me how you are going to bless me through this, enlighten me with Your Spirit, help me to see You working through this!” And He will answer you. He will.

Don’t expect explanations though. Don’t wait for everything to make sense. That may not happen. Trust! He invites you to trust Him. And once you know His loving fatherly heart, you will begin to see how He works through all things for your good.

For that glory which He has prepared for you. That’s why Paul can exclaim: **“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time [all that he had gone through] are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”** [Rom 8:18]

That’s a God-given Survival Kit for you. If you embrace it as yours, whatever happens in your life, the Spirit will assure you **“that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** Christian faith is very practical. Very practical and powerful. Especially when we face the dark side of this life, that is – our suffering.

May this God-given Survival Kit bless you on the way where Jesus leads you to the glory that will be revealed to you!

Amen.