

The Lord Works for the Good of All Believers

Romans 8:28 from the series, "The Lord Provides"

Message from the Master Broadcast May 18, 2008 by Pastor Daron Lindemann

In Russia this plant is known as "life-elixir" and its leaves are steamed and served with sour cream. Italians like the leaves chopped and, of course, sautéed with garlic in olive oil. The English boil its leaves and then toss them with vinegar and salt. Its name comes from the French, meaning "lion's tooth," so named for the pointy, tooth-like edges of its leaves and the golden color of its flowers. I'm talking about the dandelion.

In America we don't eat them, but eradicate and eliminate them. Yet they still insist on popping up in our neatly manicured lawns, overtaking our vastly green parks, and appearing overnight throughout our baseball fields and golf courses. Stubborn little lions, aren't they? Try to yank one out and you'll find yourself on your back side holding a few pointy leaves in your hands while the deep-reaching root remains safely hidden in the ground – ready to strike back in a few days. Maybe our European friends have something to teach us? Maybe they know that since ancient times the dandelion has been recognized for its medicinal qualities. Choline, one of the dandelion's main constituents, is essential to healthy liver function. The dandelion also contains hydrochloric acid, which helps the digestive system, and generous amounts of vitamins C and A and calcium. Not only that, but the dandelion is God's way of replenishing nutrients in the soil. The plant actually prefers decalcified soil, so it sends its taproot deep into the ground where it pulls up minerals from below, restoring health to the topsoil. Wherever you see dandelions peering out over green turf and turning it gold, God is at work rejuvenating the earth!

If these creations of God are really so friendly to us and our earth, then why do we look on them as our enemies? The same is true of the weeds of suffering in the manicured life of a Christian, isn't it? God intends for these friendly helpers to tap their roots deep into our being where Christ dwells and bring out heavenly perseverance and wisdom and patience and strength, replenishing the worn out exterior of our human landscape. God fills troubles and trials with nutrients that heal us and help our faith system to stay strong, active, and healthy. Yet we still try to eradicate and eliminate them. Today we conclude a Message from the Master series entitled, "The Lord Provides," by rejoicing that a day or a week or a life full of troubles and trials, like a grassy field full of dandelions, is a sign that God is at work in our lives. If you have a pestering problem that is deeply rooted and you can't pull it out, spend less effort trying to eliminate it and more effort recognizing how it replenishes you. If you can't be as manicured as you'd like because pesky problems keep popping up all over the place, stop cursing them as enemies and start considering them to be allies sent by a loving God's hand to keep you strong and alert.

The biggest problem with problems isn't the problem. It's perspective. Is the glass half empty or half full? Do you see a detour as an opportunity to slow down and take in some new scenery or as a threat to an already busy schedule packed too full of activities? Is a dandelion a weapon of the devil or a work of God? The problem with a problem is not the problem but our perspective. That puts a lot of pressure on us to stay so purely focused in faith during difficulties that don't make that easy at all. It's easy to apply a faith perspective to situations when we hear about them in sermons or talk about them at the supper table, but when we're shoved into the chilly water or someone pulls the rug out from under us and our feet head upward as quickly as our head drops downward, it's not easy to say, "I'm not worried. God is in control. Everything will be okay, just watch."

Do you agree that you'd be embarrassed if you had to tell your closest friends and family how often you've questioned God, cursed God, or confronted him as uncaring or unfaithful because of a painful problem in your life? Worse yet, later you realize how you were the unfaithful one because God made it all work out, but then another

painful problem arises and you revert to the same sinful accusations about God. How long until he just leaves us alone? How many more names must we call him before he says he's had enough? When we confront God yet again and wave him off as being unrealistic, unjust, or unloving will that be the last time he tries to help us?

Sad to say, in the problems of life we are the ones who are guilty, not God. We are guilty of an uncaring attitude that first focuses on how good we want to feel when all along someone else hurts so much – but we don't even notice. We are guilty of causing pain by losing control of our emotions and angrily disciplining children or arguing with spouse or judging those someone in authority over us. We become unfaithful to the promises we have made to love God and others in our decisions and behavior. We have operated with incorrect assumptions about God. We have shared with other people how upset and confused and hopeless we are instead of standing firm in our faith and giving God all the glory.

If we have any hope for a better perspective when problems sprout up in our lives, we cannot find that hope in ourselves. No, we are part of the problem. That's why this single promise in the Bible is so meaningful. It requires nothing of us, yet assures us that our problems are solved! God doesn't need our help to take care of our biggest problems and our tiniest troubles. How does that sound to people who are so busy and burdened that we can't seem to get it all done? The promise is this verse in Romans 8:28, *"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."* As good as that promise of God sounds when we hear the entire verse, it even sounds better when we consider it word-for-word, which is what we'll do now.

Sometimes we just don't know, and that lack of information drives us crazy. We don't know the cause of the headaches. We don't know whom to talk to when the computer is making a funny noise. We don't know if someone truly believes in us and cares about us. There is one thing that we do know, however, and it is always absolutely true no matter what. God says it like this in his Word, *"Do not be afraid ... Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed"* (Isaiah 54:4,10). If the mountains shake we'll know it. If even something utterly impossible happens and hills start moving out of place we'll know that but it will not change what else we know: God's love for sinners is unfailing. It can't be shaken or moved out of place. We don't need to be afraid. We know where we stand with God. He loves us. Always.

God's love doesn't come and go like cell phone reception. That's why the Bible promises that he'll work for our good in "all things." Not some things. Not just the really bad things. Not only things that happen between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. All things. Things that have been done to you and things you have done. Things that are naughty and things that are nice. Things that bother you and things you don't even notice. All things. Nothing in your life escapes the attention and the care of God. And the work of God.

In all things "God works." God doesn't sit on the sidelines while you toil with trouble or take a siesta in his heavenly hammock while you grind it out here on earth. God calls the sun forth each morning, escorts it across the sky, and tucks it in at night – if he didn't it would spin uncontrollably across the galaxy. God watches the sparrows and provides food for the ravens. He clothes the lilies and creates weather patterns. He's very busy, but not too busy for you. He pumps your heart while you sleep, he orders the appropriate white blood cells to battle an attacking virus, and he builds cells upon cells for growing teenage boys. None of this just happens. God is working. He is also working in your life circumstances – all of them. He knows them, he observes them, he analyzes them, he protects you from evil, and he makes plans about them.

His ultimate purpose for those plans has one goal: your good. And what benefits you might be different than what benefits someone else. He knows. He knows that you prefer steak to chicken and that you sleep on your back and not your side. He knows you'll need a bit more strength on Tuesday and a bit more wisdom on Friday and a bit more rest on Sunday. So he factors that into his work and when trouble comes knocking on your door he welcomes it, but only because he will make it work for your good. In the end, that means you'll be blessed and be a better person.

As a result, according to this Bible verse in Romans, we "love him." Like two young lovers on their honeymoon God, our heavenly bridegroom, is thrilled to make everything work out just right for us. Even before we notice how right it is, our love and appreciation for him is fulfilled beyond our dreams by what he does for us. We may hate our problems, but there's no reason to hate God. We love God, and he loves us.

More than that, we make it through suffering because we know that we "have been called according to his purpose." When life gets complicated and decisions become confusing we tend to question our ability to know exactly what is best for us. But God has known what is best for us a long time. Before he even created the world, God formed a plan and purpose for you. And then he called you to it when he brought you to faith in your baptism. You may not understand every detail of that purpose and plan as it relates to your earthly destiny, and that's okay, God still knows and directs you there. But you do know God's purpose for your eternal destiny: to live with him and be loved by him forever in heavenly paradise. He'll do whatever it takes to get you there, and to guide you in a plan he weaves for your life here.

Did you notice how this grand promise of God encourages us without even talking about our problems or sufferings? We tend to let our problems overwhelm us because we want to analyze them and determine which pieces of them we should worry about first and it only makes matters worse. God has a better idea, and he makes it work even without our help. *"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."* Amen.