

ROMANS

THE CHRISTIAN'S CONSTITUTION

STUDY TWENTY-ONE

Providence Made Practical

Romans 8:26–30

No matter how bruising the past has been, no matter how deep the pain, no matter how wrong the actions, no matter how long the addiction, you are not a spoiled product. You are being reshaped. He knows it all. He is good to the core. He is enveloped in compassion and because of His mercy, He never stops working on your clay.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THE potter has an intent and begins to work on the clay—wedging, centering on the spinning wheel, and making an opening. Then, the shaping begins—requiring so much dexterity, time, and the clay's malleability. Before we can behold the beauty and appreciate the utility of these vases as centerpieces in weddings or on dining tables or be mesmerized by their unique shapes in museums and art galleries, they undergo a messy process!

It does not take long in the Christian life to realize that our growth process is messy and takes time. It involves shaping and reshaping, sufferings and groanings—deep and most arduously difficult seasons that sometimes make us question the Potter's goodness and love. We cannot help but ask “Why?” when our lives are on God's spinning wheel.

In the prior *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we discovered that suffering is not an elective in the Christian life university. In this study, we'll visit the great Potter's house and learn about His purpose and plan in shaping and molding us into instruments that serve His will and vessels that showcase His glory.



INSIGHT FOR LIVING

The Bible-Teaching Ministry of Chuck Swindoll
Study 21 • Page 1

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

Providence Made Practical

Romans 8:26–30



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Come before the Lord as David did, confident of His intimate knowledge of you.

*O LORD, You have examined my heart
and know everything about me. . . .
You know what I am going to say
even before I say it, LORD. (Psalm 139:1, 4)*

In prayer, echo David's awareness that God knows your thoughts, emotions, and desires. Then, request His guidance as you study and apply His truths from Romans.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In Romans 8, Paul has acknowledged the inescapable presence of suffering on our journey with Christ. We know glory awaits us, even though we can't see it yet. "We hope for what we do not see" (Romans 8:25 NASB). Additionally, our pain is so severe that "we do not know what to pray" (8:26 NASB). So, in our suffering, we can't see what we're hoping for, and we can't even pray! We desperately need some solid truth to lean on.

What truths will Paul offer? First, he assured us that the Father "knows us far better than we know ourselves" (8:27 MSG). God is *omniscient*. He knows how things will turn out in His plan. Second, in God's *providence*, Paul tells us that God is in control. He is guiding events according to His plan.

Have you endured a season of suffering, hoping for something you couldn't see and didn't know what to pray for? What was that situation like? What truth did you cling to?

Providence Made Practical

Romans 8:26–30



Observation: The Providence of God

Take the first step of our *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method by observing [Romans 8:28–30](#).¹ Notice how these verses flow out of [8:26–27](#)—in which Paul said the Spirit’s prayers for us are “in harmony with God’s own will.” The subject of *God’s will* leads Paul to declare one of the most well-known and often-quoted promises in the Bible.

God’s Unconditional Promise—Romans 8:28

Read God’s unconditional promise in [Romans 8:28](#) slowly, closely, and in more than one translation. The promise is founded upon God’s character, who is the verse’s central figure. What promise does this verse hold? What works together? To what end? For whom was this promise intended?

God’s Underlying Plan—Romans 8:29–30

In [Romans 8:29–30](#), Paul describes how God accomplishes His purposes for us and for His glory in a string of key verbs. In the following chart, list God’s actions as translated in the New Living Translation and the New American Standard Bible.

Romans 8:29–30 NLT	Romans 8:29–30 NASB

The Father calls His children “according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). In [8:29](#), for what purpose has the Father “predestined” us (8:29 NASB)? What is the Father’s primary goal for our lives?

Providence Made Practical

Romans 8:26–30

Step-by-step, God takes His children by the hand to glory. According to [Romans 8:30](#), how do these steps lead one to the next?

When we're at our wit's end, and we have no idea even what to pray for, God's providence offers comfort to our confused hearts. Our lives are in the hands of a sovereign God. Never forget that. He attends to every detail. He's never caught off guard by what you and I would call tragedies. He causes all things to work together for good and for His glory. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: God's Plan to Conform Believers to Christ's Image

Interpretation helps us discover what the author meant for his original audience. Knowing how the Roman Christians in the first century understood Paul's message helps us understand it.

Let's take another look at God's unconditional promise in Romans 8:28, putting each component of this verse under the interpretive microscope.² For each word or phrase listed below, write down the principle—timeless truth—that each one teaches about God's promise, His plan, or His purpose.

"And we know. . .": _____

". . . that God causes . . .": _____

". . . everything . . .": _____

". . . to work together *for the good* . . .": _____

". . . of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them": _____

Providence Made Practical

Romans 8:26–30

The verse does not say, “We hope, we guess, we suppose, we feel, we pray, we wish, we’re told.” It says, “We know.” The term used for “know” is the Greek word for absolute, unshakable confidence. Our confidence is not in our situation. Our confidence is not in our working things out; our confidence is not in someone else working things out. It is in God Himself. We know that He is at work.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Paul explained God’s plan by saying, “those whom He foreknew, He also predestined” (Romans 8:29 NASB). Look up the Greek verbs [proginosko](#), “foreknew,” and [proorizo](#), “predestine,” in the Greek lexicon at [billmounce.com](#). These are two central aspects of *who* God is and *what* He does. How are they connected? What are the implications for us?

This is the part that’s so difficult to get our heads around because of our limited perspective. We see now, God sees forever. We see our little world; God sees a broader circle that includes who knows how many people will be impacted. The plan is total, not partial. “All things work together.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Now use your Bible-study resources to understand “conform.” It’s the Greek verb [symmorphos](#) ([billmounce.com](#)). How would you explain in today’s language what Paul means: “God predestined [us] to become conformed to the image of His Son” (8:29 NASB)?

What’s the purpose of it all? He is shaping your clay to look like Jesus. God chips away at everything that doesn’t look like Jesus. And there’s a lot of it in your life and there’s a ton of it in mine. He knows what He’s doing, and He has to do it in me. There’s no other way Jesus will emerge. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Providence Made Practical

Romans 8:26–30



Correlation: The Great Potter and Our Clay

Paul knew his nation's history well—how God's providence shaped and reshaped them to fulfill His purpose for them. The various prophets, the nation's years of disobedience, and the warnings of God's judgment all reveal God's hand at work—just as the prophet Jeremiah learned in his field trip to the potter's house.

Read God's instructions to Jeremiah in [Jeremiah 18:1–10](#). Note the prophet's observations and message from God. What did you learn from this passage about God as the potter and Israel as the clay?

Think of God's unique, tailor-made plan for believers as He conforms them to the image of His Son. Compare [Romans 8:28–30](#) with [Isaiah 55:8–9](#) and [Ephesians 2:8–10](#). What makes it difficult for our human minds to comprehend God's plan and His ability to make all of it work together for good?

How did Joseph express to his brothers his faith in God's providence to bring good out of bad in [Genesis 50:20](#)?

So, my first response to God's providence initially was rejection, just rejection. Why? Because it didn't square with my horizontal plan of God, my picture of God. I thought of Him as an old man with a long beard, a lot older than anybody else. A lot like other people but just older. Then I realized He's not at all like us. God is sovereign. I need to embrace it and so do you. And let it be.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Providence Made Practical

Romans 8:26–30



Application: Find Rest in the Potter's Hand!

Reflect on the principles you wrote earlier based on Romans 8:28. Let's summarize them this way: God's promise is based on fact, not feeling. The project is God's, not ours. His plan is total, not partial, and His purpose is good, not evil. How do these truths give you solid footing in your current struggles?

How has the Holy Spirit opened your eyes that will help you find rest in the Potter's hand?

You're telling me that what happened to me was good? No, I'm not. I said it worked together for good. Much of what happens isn't good. Much of what happens is downright wrong and unfair. Much of what happens is brutal, shocking, and demoralizing, but in God's overall plan, which is like a massive panoramic umbrella, God is at work doing His will. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What thoughts or emotions do you feel knowing that God is at work in your present groanings? Why not share these thoughts here? If you have a spiritual mentor, share your thoughts with him or her.

Because He knows all and because He loves us with an infinite amount of love and because He is good to the core and filled with compassion, the situation in which I find myself is the place for God to do His best work. It's the platform of His sovereign working. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Providence Made Practical

Romans 8:26–30



A FINAL PRAYER

Lord God, remind me of Your goodness and compassion when my heart questions Your hand. Help me to be willing and moldable—desirous of being shaped for Your use and glory! In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"
2. See Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Romans," in *Constable's Notes*, 2025 ed., Sonic Light, <https://soniclight.com/tcon/notes/html/romans/romans.htm>, note 8:28.

For the 2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2007, 2025 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

insight.org

Insight for Living
Study 21 • Page 8