

August 21, 2010 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church  
Romans 8:17b-39 The Key to Confident Living by Andy McDonald

One of the challenges of being a pastor is the suffering of people and we all suffer, we all endure something, experience pain, anguish, bear some burden, go through some crisis.

And in those moments of our suffering we often question God.  
The questions come and we want answers.

Just this week I was talking to a friend who lost one of his sons in an automobile accident just as the son was moving into his adult life. We were at a conference together and someone had just said something about God using, not causing but using, the tragedies of life to help us grow spiritually. And even after a number of years he, a fellow pastor, questions: If God is capable of preventing the accident and didn't isn't there some culpability on God's part?

So many of our questions have at their heart some form of the challenge, "Why didn't God..."

Why didn't God keep my child from dying?  
Why didn't God stop my home from being foreclosed?  
Why didn't God heal me, my spouse, my parent, my child, my friend  
Why didn't God let me keep my job?  
Why didn't God help me not flunk my test?  
Why didn't God save my marriage?  
Why didn't God keep me from caving to temptation?

If God is so powerful pastor, if God is able to do much more than we can ask or even imagine, "Why doesn't he?"

What we want is to see the box!

How many of you enjoy putting together a jigsaw puzzle? Whether you love doing a puzzle or hate it is really not the point of this

illustration. How do you go about putting a puzzle together? Maybe you proceed as I do. I dump the pieces of the puzzle on the table and then I start going through the pieces turning each one face up and simultaneously separate out all the pieces with a straight edge. And after all the pieces are face up I then start attempting to connect all those straight edged pieces to create a frame within which all the remaining pieces will eventually fit. Sometimes the frame is rather obvious other times it too is difficult to assemble so either as I'm constructing the frame or immediately thereafter, I reach for the box because on that box is the thing I most need to assemble the puzzle. There on the top of the box is a picture. It is the picture of what will appear when all the individual pieces are connected.

### SLIDE OF PUZZLE

Can you imagine the difficulty of completing the puzzle with no box lid to coach us to completion? Minus that picture on the box everything might seem haphazard, random, out of control.

We have this GIANT life-size puzzle called our lives, all the good stuff and all the suffering stuff, with no box lid to look at. Or maybe we have just one little corner of a torn picture.

And so we have a zillion questions as we wish to know the bigger picture. As we seek to understand how the pieces all fit, we wonder if there is any emerging picture, any design, any sense to life.

What Paul teaches us in our passage of scripture for today, Romans 8:17b-39, is that there is one who sees the box. That God has a perspective, and that from his perspective the picture is clear, there is a plan and this teaching brings our questions into focus.

Can God's plan, God's perspective of the big picture be trusted? When we only have hints, and clues, and examples, can we walk by faith and trust God's perspective?

We just hold our piece of the puzzle and we wonder if it even goes in God's big puzzle? Maybe we are trying to put our piece in the wrong puzzle?

We come to the text in the heart of this chapter, a text that comforts many and but it disturbs us. Romans 8:28 says "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."

And sometimes that all sounds like pie in the sky. From our perspective the puzzle seems chaotic. Things seem different than that text, at least in our lives. Our experience seems more haphazard and out of control.

We can't see the picture on the box and all the pieces of puzzle confuse us. We sit and stare at our piece of puzzle and for the life of us we can't see where any two pieces even might connect.

And too often we choose to either pretend we don't have a problem and pretend it all makes sense, and pretend we are okay, or we go to work to grab the pieces of the puzzle within our reach and create our own picture. Neither of those options is ideal.

Listen, the key to confident living is to choose to trust God's perspective.

The wisest man Solomon penned these wise words: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and don't lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight."  
Proverbs 3:5&6

Can we come to trust God's perspective even when from our perspective it looks bad? When my path seems crooked and off kilter. When I can't see from my perspective how any of the puzzle can come together, can I still choose to trust God's perspective.

In the book Ministry of Healing, Ellen White writes: “Above the distractions of the earth, God sits enthroned. All things are open to his divine survey and from his great and calm eternity he orders that which his providence sees best.” P. 417

Perspective makes a difference. I’ll never forget Dr. Ray Hefferlin, the brilliant Physics teacher at my college giving a talk one Friday evening about God and different dimensions. His thesis was that God exists in a dimension beyond our understanding and one of the illustrations stuck with me. It was a picture similar to this one I drew.

### SLIDE OF DRAWING

This is a flat two dimensional drawing. We, in our visually three dimensional world we can look at this drawing and see all five stick figure people at one time. But in that two dimensional world each of the 5 stick figures can see none of the others in the picture. Walls of the house and the tree block their view.

In the same way God sees the whole picture from the box of puzzle pieces and from his perspective he knows what it takes for each piece to fit. And he sees that the picture at the end is a very good picture.

I recently watched a YouTube video story of a family who adopted a child from a Russian orphanage and then have chosen another child who has actually visited their home and whom they have determined to take into their family but she had to return to the orphanage while they work to get all the paper work and time consuming legal documentation completed.

Each day longer that she stays back at the orphanage I imagine the harder it is to believe that she has been adopted! And if time goes on too long she might come to disbelieve because she can’t see the legal wrangling and the efforts being made to bring her to her new home.

Paul writes that all of creation is groaning to be relieved from death and decay. And we too wait for that day when God will give us our full rights as his children. We've been adopted but we still live at the orphanage, and so our perspectives can be blurry. And all of our questions rise up in us, but the key to confident living is to trust God's perspective.

The truth is that God's perspective is all that really matters.

When I look in the mirror on a good day I can have false pride.

I can believe that I'm pretty good. I can imagine myself one of those people worthy of salvation and heaven and a whole bunch of good stuff on the way. That can be my perspective. and

When I look in the mirror on a bad day I can have false guilt.

I can see myself as so bad as to not able to be saved. The distance between what I'm like and what God is like so distant that I am hopeless. That can be my perspective.

And when I go out in public on a good day or bad your perspectives might match my own about me.

But it isn't my perspective or yours that is most important. It is the perspective of the judge of the race. And listen to what Paul writes to the Romans about God's perspective in Romans 8:29 & 30

For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn, with many brothers and sisters. And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. (Here it is, catch God's perspective.) And God gave them right standing with himself, and he promised them his glory."

We are given right standing with God! Why? How?

Because some 2000 years ago Jesus was willing to trust God's perspective! He knew the key to confident living.

He was struggling in prayer to his Father in the garden of Gethsemane.

Why do I have to suffer? Why don't you get me out of this mess?

Isn't there another way? I liked the picture on the box of the puzzle when we started putting it together but now I'm not so sure? Can we get another puzzle? This seems like a bad plan.

But then in a prayer that models for us the essence of prayer itself he says those words that evidence a trust in his Father's perspective, "Not my will but yours be done." My will must be limited by my perspective. You can see more and further and completely so I don't trust my will I trust your will your perspective.

And Jesus is disowned so we can be adopted.

What do we do? I went through our passage and here's what Romans 8:17-39 says we do.

We suffer

We groan to be released from pain and suffering

We wait anxiously, patiently, confidently

We look forward to something we don't have yet.

We don't know how or what we should pray.

We have trouble, calamity, and persecution,

We are hungry, cold, in danger, threatened with death.

We are killed every day, slaughtered like sheep.

It isn't hard to understand why when we focus on our perspective and the things we do, our earthly plight, it is easy to lose faith.

But we can trust God's perspective. Mixed into that same chapter Paul writes about the good news of what God does. Listen to what God does:

God adopts us as his children

God will give us his glory

God will reveal that we are really his kids

A day is coming when God will give us our full rights as his children,

even new bodies  
God saves us  
God the Holy Spirit helps us in our distress  
God the Holy Spirit prays for us  
God hears the prayer for us  
God causes everything to work together for good, all the pieces  
    come together and create a beautiful picture beyond our imaginations  
God calls us  
God has a purpose for us  
God has always known us even before we came to be  
God chose us  
God gives us right standing with himself  
God promises us glory  
God is for us  
God didn't spare his son but gave him up for us all  
God gives us everything else  
God has chosen us as his very own  
Jesus died for us  
Jesus was raised to life for us  
Jesus is pleading for us.  
Overwhelming victory is ours through Christ  
Christ loves us  
God's love sticks to us like glue—nothing can separate us from that  
love.

So regardless of what life throws our way.  
Regardless of how we may not see where our piece of the puzzle  
connects.

God's love isn't up to you. There's really nothing you can do about it.  
You didn't win it and you can't lose it NOTHING can separate us from  
God's love.

Listen to Paul's list of what can't separate us from God's love.

Death can't

Life can't

Angels can't

Demons can't

Our fears can't

Our worries can't

Powers of hell can't

NOTHING in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So You can trust God's perspective it is the key to confident living.