

The other night I watched *A River Runs Through It*. I'd seen it before some years back, but watched it again. The movie told the story of a family, who lived in Montana early in the twentieth century.

The father of the family was a Presbyterian minister—stern but loving. His wife was supportive and nurturing. They had two sons: the oldest, first-born Norman, who tells the story, and a younger son, Paul.

We watch them grow up through childhood, stormy adolescence, and crossing the threshold into adulthood. Norman, the older of the two, is cautious and studious. The younger son Paul is the daredevil, with a quick wit and a winning smile.

There is a river that runs through their part of Montana. That river becomes the focal point of their family life. The family knew failure and success and laughter and fighting and change and disappointment, but always the river was there, running through it.

Perhaps we could say that there is a river that runs through the lives of Christian people, and that river is called the **Purpose of God**. We read about it just a few moments ago: "We know that in all things work for the good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."

The purpose of God is our redemption, that all will be glorified who love him.

+I remember being a bit down and walked around in a cemetery and came across that passage on a gravestone – it hit me, just love him and God will work it out for His good. That's the purpose of God, and He is working always to accomplish it. It's the purpose that flows through time and space and all the jumbled events of our individual lives.

However, there's a difference between a reason and a purpose.

Sometimes when bad things happen, we say things like, "Well, God has His reasons," or "There's a reason for everything," or "Everything works out for the best." We mean well when we say things like that. We're doing our best to make sense out of what has happened, to justify it so that we can live with it all.

But a reason for everything? I'm not so sure about that.

A reason implies a simple cause-and-effect relationship an underlying motive that makes logical sense out of everything that happens. Reason looks to justify every event as good and worthwhile and meaningful and significant.

"Things don't just happen," we say. "They're done for a reason." But I'm not so sure about that.

If there is a reason, then who is behind it? Tell me, who is responsible for cancer that takes all ages – children? What's the justifiable motive for mass starvation or for child abuse or the genocide of a people over racial hatred?

A reason for everything? I'm not so sure.

But this I know: A purpose runs through it—the eternal purpose of God to restore this universe to its intended splendor and to enable us to become the eternal beautiful beings we were created to be.

Reason looks at the isolated event; purpose looks to the big picture. Reason is fixated on the present; purpose looks down the road to future outcomes. Reason insists on an explanation; purpose says let's get on with it. Reason hangs on to the event; purpose hangs on to God, who is at work in it all.

Romans 8:28 is about purpose not reasons. Romans 8:28 does not say everything that happens is good. It doesn't even say that all things work together for good. No, it says that God works in all things, good and bad; we need only to love and trust God.

He gives us the freedom to choose even when those choices are foolish and hurtful to themselves and the world. He doesn't control and manipulate everything, just as any parent their children. He works with the things that happen, working them together in his strong hands so that his purpose is accomplished. His River runs through it.

A reason for everything? I'm not sure about that. But a purpose in everything? Absolutely—God's purpose is to restore this fallen earth and to redeem us for Himself.

God's purpose will prevail: There is no stopping that. Despite Satan's schemes, despite the unpredictability of this world, despite the foolishness and even the wickedness of human beings, God's purpose will be accomplished.

Nothing can thwart God—nothing in space, nothing in time, nothing in earth or in heaven or under the earth, nothing in life, and nothing in death. For the Christian, death may be a loss (however tragic), but it's never a defeat.

+We do get glimpses of this future glory in our own lives: Those moments when all is suspended, as you experience those beautiful, grace filled moments in our lives. It is when like I was on vacation with my family and many little ones – experiencing the fullness and love in being with one another. Then, it comes to an abrupt close.

My niece told us that after leaving from vacation, he cried half-way home pondering why we couldn't just always be together. What he had was a glimpse of what one day will be so in this world beyond us.

In this life, those moments are few and fleeting. But someday they will be yours and mine to enjoy forever because that is God's purpose—that you and I should attain to the highest possibilities for which we were created, men and women in the image of God and conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ, spending eternity with the ones we love in Christ and with him, in worlds beyond our imagination.

It will be good. It will be very good. It will be beyond anything you and I have ever experienced. That is what Jesus promises in that passage from Paul's letter.

That is the purpose of God. There is no power on earth or in heaven or under the earth that can prevent that from happening because God works in all things for the good of those who love him and who are surrendered to his will.

Whatever has happened to you in the past, whatever your present circumstances may be, whatever the future might hold, know this: A river runs through it, and that river is called *The Purpose of God*.