

With You in the Fire (18.9.1985)

by Nigel Lee

God's goal for us is to be conformed to the image of His Son, and He helps us achieve this through the Holy Spirit's role in our lives.

Duration: 37:35

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 8:18, Romans 8:28-29

Topics: "Protection"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker encourages the audience to reflect on God's ultimate objectives for their lives. He acknowledges that towards the end of a conference, people may start feeling weary and tired. However, he reminds them that God's goal for them is not just to engage in mass evangelism or missionary work, but to deeply transform their character. The speaker emphasizes the assurance that God is with them in all circumstances and that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose. He concludes by praying for the speaker, Peter, who is traveling back home, and asks for God's guidance and encouragement for the audience as they read and reflect on His Word.

Transcript

Romans 8, 18, put your finger in that while we pray. Dear Father in heaven, we are utterly cast on you that as we read your word and just think through these few verses that you would encourage us, teach us, touch us. We know that you're with us.

Open our eyes now to something more of the glory of yourself in the word. We pray for Peter as he travels back home or at least towards that funeral he must go to in England. Lord would you help him, travelling through the night and then on through the day and up home later on this evening.

Encourage and refresh and use him we pray this day. Thank you for all that he means to us, his steadiness, his wisdom, his love of your word. Lord you know how we wish that he were here to share with us on this last morning.

We would want to generously pray. Lord touch us again we pray through these scriptures. Verse 18, for I reckon that the sufferings of this present time, I haven't even got my new international version, I'm reading from the old revised version of 1881 which I normally use for study.

I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us. For the earnest expectation of the creation waited for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption unto the liberty of the glory of the children of God.

For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now, and not only so, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. For by hope were we saved, but hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopeth for that which is seen? But if we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.

And in like manner the spirit also helpeth our infirmity. For we know not how to pray as we ought, but the spirit himself maketh intercession for us, with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth for hearts knoweth what is the mind of the spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose. For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. And whom he foreordained, them he also called.

Whom he called, them he also justified. And whom he justified, them he also glorified. We'll stop there.

It's a chapter of tremendous encouragement, Romans chapter 8. It's come after Paul's wrestling with the reality of sin in chapter 7. And now in chapter 8 the Holy Spirit comes to the rescue. And he helps us deal with our flesh there in the early verses of chapter 8. The Holy Spirit assures us of our salvation as children of God. Chapter of great encouragement.

He assures us of coming glory. And in the verses that we've read, the Holy Spirit helps us with our praying. Now it's good to step back from all that you're involved with and just think, what are God's ultimate objectives for my life? We're coming to the end of the conference.

People are beginning to think that perhaps they might be, maybe a little bit weary of meetings. The thought does sometimes, you know. They have eaten just about enough cornflakes for this September 1985.

If they have to eat any more slabs of Belgian brown bread. Some people, you know, after a conference, they stand up tall and they look down and they've lost sight of their feet. As the outer man has far from wasting away, as Scripture said it would, been increasing.

And they wonder whether it's the inner man that's been wasting away. And yet within a few weeks you'll be launching out on your teams, not seeing very far ahead. Putting your hand in the hand of God and going in faith.

I remember as if it were yesterday, my beginning on the year program. I was an odd case as usual. And I set off at six in the morning.

I went to George Verwer's house. I picked up his five-year-old son to take him from Bromley in South London to Lahore in Pakistan. Where I would meet with George who would relieve me of him.

Peter Conlon was travelling the same trip with Benjamin Verwer who was seven. We had the most extraordinary adventures on the way. We lost both boys in a petrol station in Afghanistan.

We were trying to cross a border. Truck loaded up with stuff that we didn't know what was in it. There was a huge chest.

We never looked inside it. We were simply driving it out to India. We came to a border post.

I forget now whether it was... The customs officer said, what is it? He said, what is it really? Personal stuff? So he said, open it. There we were, Peter Conlon, myself and two others and these two little boys, one five and one seven. When we opened this great box up at his inquiry, absolutely full of ladies' underwear.

This was Charlie clothes being sent out to equip half the teams in India. And the customs officer looked at me and said, personal clothes? And I gave him my last Mars bar and he waved us through the customs post. I've been saving these Mars bars for the next two years.

Lost them all getting ladies' Charlie into India. You know, you don't know what... I don't know how I got on to that story. But this is the crisis.

You don't know what you're getting into. And I want to just remind you of some of the assurances that we have here in this chapter. The first is this.

That God's great goal, the outside frame of the jigsaw puzzle. Do you remember that from the first day? Is in verse twenty-nine, to make you be conformed to the image of his son. His goal for you this year, he could just as well accomplish if you stayed back home, working as a porter in a hospital.

Or if you were back in college, or if you were in Bible school, or if you were working in a factory. He could just as well accomplish it, as if you go. It's his goal.

His goal for you is not mass evangelism. It's not missionary exposure alone. It's not just travel.

Through it all, he wants to, with your cooperation, deeply change your character. He wants us to be sons and daughters like him. When the Queen of England, as she now is, in 1952, was out in Africa.

She was not yet Queen. Her father, George VI, had gone through the war. And then, he was always ill with cancer.

And in 1952, he died. And the Princess Elizabeth was out in Kenya, or Tanzania, somewhere. In a game park, by a watering hole.

And there were elephants and hippopotamuses. And there was mud. And there were monkeys.

It was a real muddy, ordinary human, down-to-earth scene. And someone arrived, who'd come from London. And they went up to the Princess, and they knelt down.

And they said, Your Majesty. And she knew at the moment that she was addressed, Your Majesty. She knew that her dear father had died.

And that she was now the Queen. Now, humanly, she was dressed in gumboots. Safari clothes.

Mosquitoes were biting her. She probably had a bit of diarrhoea. She was out on one of these tours.

And yet, she was Majesty. She had a long way to go from that muddy hole in Africa. Until she eventually sat on the throne in Westminster Abbey.

We have got a long way to go. We've been promised that if we are faithful, we will one day reign with Him. God's goal for us is exceedingly high and glorious.

And yet, He addresses us now with the status of being Prince, Princess, if you like, sons and daughters of the Living God. But His goal is that we become like Him in character. And then we read of the help of the Holy Spirit, verses 26 and 27.

And I like this because, you know, you may, in going home, really wonder about how many prayer partners you have. You read in these verses of two people who have signed up as your prayer partner already. There is Jesus in heaven who is praying for you.

And there is the Holy Spirit within you who is praying for you. So your list, at least, has two great prayer partners on it. And these two prayer partners are rather unlike the rest of your prayer partners.

They are certainly faithful, they know exactly how to pray for you. In like manner, the Spirit helps us in our infirmity. You've got two problems.

And the Holy Spirit will help you in both. You are weak and you are ignorant. We have infirmity and we don't know how to pray as we ought.

The filling and the inspiration and the leading of the Holy Spirit is as essential to our salvation as Christ's death on the cross. Salvation in the ultimate sense of bringing us right through to glory, prepared to be with God for eternity. We have a weakness in our prayer.

Isn't that true? Don't you sometimes feel, you know, you wish that you knew more of prayer? You were more faithful in prayer? You knew more how to pray? There was more discipline? And yet how many of you have known what it is to get a hold of yourself and to go and pray and as you begin to pray, somehow God... And that which was, you know, a cold start of a vehicle in the morning, suddenly, the engine begins to go. Have you known that? You bring your unruly heart, it runs around like a puppy dog, you bring it with discipline before God and you set yourself to pray and then the Holy Spirit begins to ignite the afterburners. I've mixed my metaphors but you understand what I'm talking about.

He helps us in our weakness. He seems to pick up the heavy end of the load but also he helps us in our ignorance. We don't know how to pray, do we, so often? Even for ourselves.

We're so like children. I remember it was yesterday, my oldest girl's birthday. She was 11 back in England.

I can remember when she was a kid and she would call out in the night and I remember going through one night and she was sitting up about 2 o'clock in the morning, this little girl, Alison, and, Daddy, I want an apple. It's the middle of the night, you can't have an apple. I want you to read me a story then.

A nice story about Jesus. Right round the little thing. I said, look, it's not time for stories in the middle of the night.

You should be sleeping. Well, I want a fizzy drink then. I said, I'm not giving you a fizzy drink.

You'll have to get up later in the night, won't you? Well, let's go for a walk in the park then. She didn't know what she wanted except company. She'd woken up, she wanted Dad around doing the kind of things that little girls get dads to do.

We're like that in our prayers too, aren't we? As you pray for yourself. Most of us don't really know how we ought to pray for ourselves. We perhaps don't fully recognise, even at the end of this conference, what our real needs are.

Maybe, you know, we're battling with problems of spiritual dryness or disillusion or difficulty and we half recognise it and then we don't. The vision is not clear. And the Holy Spirit within knows exactly how you should be prayed for.

And however you may pray for yourself, He is also praying as your best prayer partner for you according to your real need. It's remarkable, isn't it? The Lord will pray Himself for us. In Luke chapter 10, the disciples were sent out on campaign.

They were sent out in pairs. They were sent out to preach the Gospel. They were sent out in simplicity, with very little in the way of food, clothing.

They were sent out with authority over the forces of the evil one. But they were not, in Luke 10, told anything of the Holy Spirit going with them. But now the Lord commissions us, sends us out with the Holy Spirit dwelling within us to pray for us, working in each of us.

And He prays for accuracy, with accuracy for us. How do you feel with this idea? That God knows exactly your life, the needs of your life, how vulnerable you may be at the moment to certain pressures. He knows precisely what's coming up.

Some of you may be going home, those of you Europeans, and maybe you're going to walk into a real buzzing hornet's swarm at home. People are going to say things that are going to really hurt you or upset you. There may be troubles coming in your church and you're going to find that very difficult to cope with.

Maybe there are going to be disappointments, even bereavements, that you're going to have to face in the weeks ahead. And the Lord Himself knows and He prays for you before you get there. The non-Christian, the person who doesn't know God at all, they are frightened by the idea that God knows them.

You can see that in an evangelistic meeting, when you tell people and you enforce it that God knows their heart, He knows their lusts and their jealousies. He knows the way they seek to hurt people. He knows the critical spirit that they have.

People will go white at the thought that God knows them. But for the Christian, that same truth is immensely encouraging. That God knows us.

He accepts us. We are accepted in His beloved Son. And He prays for us with absolute accuracy.

And He prays for us according to God's will. I wonder what problems you're going to face in the year ahead. When I finally got out to India, managed to get the boy to his father and then left him and carried on, the single biggest thing I think that I faced over those three years was loneliness.

I would never have anticipated it. I'm not normally a lonely person. I was the only Westerner on a team.

The only white face I ever saw was my own in the shaving mirror in the morning. And then when my shaving mirror broke, I didn't have anybody. Some of the chaps couldn't speak much English.

I come straight from a college where my mind, I suppose, was as tuned as it ever will be. I was deeply lonely at times. Lonely for people I could joke with, with my own kind of humour.

Lonely for people who could understand me. Letters weren't getting through. I was sick as well, dysentery on and off for two years.

Deeply lonely. And yet I tell you, it was at that time, looking back now, I am so grateful to God, because it was at that time that He drew near. God the Holy Spirit, praying for me day by day, knowing about my weakness, knowing that I didn't even know how to pray for myself, He drew near.

Made Himself more real. He prayed for me through all that. For some it may be loss of privacy this coming year.

I guess you won't be too lonely on the ships, there's people everywhere you turn. Maybe you just get fed up with living in a tiny little cabin, four people squashed into a shoebox, and you can't get off the ship. I mean, it's water.

Loss of privacy. And that may be a real pressure. Cultural shock and adaptation involved in that.

Or maybe you're going to be on a team with a difficult person. What Joyce Landorff calls an irregular person. It's a kind phrase, isn't it? Irregular person.

And maybe you're going to have to be in a cabin or on a team for the coming year with an irregular person. Now, the Lord knows. And He's already been speaking to you and preparing you.

Have you been listening to His word as He's been preparing you for this? Or maybe there will be denominational pressures for you. You know, you come from a particular background and you find that everyone else is rather different. And you find yourself under a subtle kind of intimidation.

I remember watching a girl from the Hebrides, who come from the wee free kirk of Scotland, sitting in a meeting at an August conference some years ago. Now, the August conference is often very British in flavour. Much more so than the June conference.

Being British and nowadays, it tends to be much more charismatic in flavour. And there were people around who were expressing themselves in worship in ways that she was, I could see, utterly unused to. There were arms aloft and people were swaying and moving.

It was almost like the back of the Manchester United football. And she was sort of sitting on her hands, lest they, you know, do anything naughty. And the pressure on her, of that.

Some folk really feel that. And whatever it may be, God knows our hearts. And we read here that He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

He that searches the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the spirit. He knows. Knows what you're going to go through on your own.

You saw that film, Chariots of Fire. Many of you. That brilliant athlete who played rugby for Scotland and then ran for Britain in the Olympics in 1924, eventually died in a Japanese prison of war camp in China.

But he... The secret of his power on the athletics track or the sports field were those long, lonely, training runs on the hills of his native Scotland. When nobody saw him, when the rain was pouring down and he was just pounding on them. God will know about those kind of lonely disciplines that you may go through.

He prays for you. He draws near. You have a prayer partner that is better than any other possibly could be.

And I want you to draw near to such a God during this year. Some of you may even already in your opening months in OM have started to think about certain emotional involvements. Allow your soul to be drawn closer to God this year.

Because that's God's great goal that you may be conformed to His image. The Lord had prayed for Peter. I've said this before here.

It's one of the things that struck me very deeply. Peter and Paul were different, weren't they? Psychologically. Paul was the kind of character who would stand up in front of Nero, that vicious Roman Emperor, and chained though he was, say, Nero, I wish with all my heart that you were as I am, apart from these chains.

That you are a converted man. And he would say that without any disciples around, egging him on and clapping, I'll give it to him, Paul. Peter was different.

You stood Peter up in front of a hostile crowd and Peter's particular psychological makeup tended to crumble. Even a little girl could blow him over. They were different.

We find Peter crumbling in Galatians 2. We find him, same in the Gospels. Same Peter, different psychological makeup. And the Lord said to Peter, I've prayed for you, that your faith fail not.

You're going to come under great temptation this night. Tomorrow before the cock crows you will have denied me three times, Peter. Not true.

I've already seen it coming. I've seen this chink in your armour. Peter, I'm telling you this, out of love, not critically.

I've already been praying for you. The Lord took time out to pray for his friends because he saw their weakness. Prayed for them before the crisis came.

I imagine that when it did come and Peter was out in the streets weeping bitterly, having let the Lord down, eventually when he began to come to his senses, he remembered that the Lord had in fact spoken. Had assured him of prayer. That his faith was not doomed to failure.

That he'd even been offered before the crisis that ministry of strengthening his brethren. That out of weakness would come that strength. So that Peter, perhaps more than any of the other apostles in the early church, was able to draw alongside those who felt themselves to be failures.

John Mark also quit and ran away when he'd been called out on a missionary journey. Chapter 13 of Acts, you remember, he only lasted five verses. Ran off back home.

And yet it was Peter, we understand, who ministered to him. He strengthened his brethren. The Lord was using Peter.

Had prayed for Peter. Watched over Peter. Understood his psychological needs.

Ministered to him at that point of need. What a great prayer partner the Lord was. Then we read in verse 28 that the Spirit helps us in all our circumstances.

We know that to them that love God all things work together for good. To those that are called according to his purpose. Sometimes we imagine that with the guidance of the Lord things will automatically go more smoothly.

If only God guides us, then everything will be well. Friends, that is not true. It's not biblical.

It's a silly idea. It's not worthy of you as a Christian. The Bible doesn't bear that out.

God's people were led in the wilderness sometimes into war. Into the Amalekites attacking them. In following the guidance of God they came into some greater difficulties than they would otherwise have been in.

The Apostle Paul was guided all around the Mediterranean. Guided into riots, into imprisonments, into arrest and trouble of one sort and another. Difficulty in your life is not necessarily a sign that you've somehow got away from the guidance of God.

God may well have led you into difficulties but his purpose is that these things will work together for good. Think of Daniel chapter 3. Daniel's three prayer partners, if you like. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

And they told Nebuchadnezzar, no we will not worship this idol that you've set up. And you may heat the furnace up as high as you like. We will not bow down and worship your great golden monster.

And Nebuchadnezzar said, I will throw you into the furnace. And they said, well you do what you feel you have to. And so the three men were tossed into the furnace, bound, says Daniel chapter 3. They bound them hand and foot and threw them like rag dolls into this blazing furnace.

And then Nebuchadnezzar watched. He saw four men in there. There'd been a man in there already, waiting for them to arrive.

He met them. And the four of them walked up and down inside that furnace and had fellowship together. And the only thing that the flames did was to make those three bound men a bit more like the one man who was free.

The flames burnt off that which was tying them and holding them. They met the Lord there, in the fire. Nebuchadnezzar was utterly astonished.

In fact, seeing that process of change was one major step on the road to Nebuchadnezzar's own conversion. Eventually he seems to have become a God-fearing believer. Now you may well feel that you've been thrown into some pretty fiery situations.

You'll meet the Lord there. He's there waiting. And his purpose is that you might become like him.

Freer. Able to have fellowship with him. That's the way God is.

All these things will work together for the good. For those that love him. God's great majestic purpose for you is that you become like him.

No longer are you like prisoners trudging around in a prison yard, head down, you know. Ephesians chapter 2, you walked according to the course of the prince of this age, imprisoned in death. But you have been made alive.

You've been set free. God has called you up out of that prison, foreordained you to be sons and daughters, to live like him, to love like him, to care like him. And just like the Lord, you need to concentrate, I think perhaps in these early months, so important for you, on how, with all the pressures and the crowds, did the Lord stay fresh and alive in spirit? Yes, we know he's God, but he also will tell us some of the secrets of his own service of the Father.

Look in John chapter 4 for one good one. We need to learn in these early days how to walk with him. Sure he may lead us into difficulties, unexpected pressures.

He assures us from the outset that we're his children. He's going to pray for us. We need to learn how to drink that living water, to draw it up from the wells of salvation, as Isaiah 12 says.

As we go, as we go with him, as he meets us, we become like him. He has set his heart on it. He's paid a mighty big price for you.

He's not going to let you be damaged, broken on the way. In fact, the problems that the Lord will have to deal with in this coming year in your life are nothing compared with the problem he has already dealt with in dying for you on the cross. If you want to think of cycling over a great hill to a village on the other side, the difficult bit is going up the hill, isn't it? Then you can coast down.

In seeing you won into his kingdom and transformed so that you're ready for glory, Christ has already done the hard part in dying for you on the cross, knowing what you were like, giving himself in order that you might be his. Dealing with you now, encouraging you, training you, teaching you, that's the easy part. That's cycling down the other side of the hill for him.

He's committed himself to you. What great verses. Let's just read again from verse 26 and then we'll close.

In like manner, the Spirit also helps our infirmity. We know not how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. That's the third groaning that we've looked at in these verses.

The creation groans, and then we groan, and now the Spirit groans, groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose, for whom he foreknew he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren, great family likenesses, is going to appear.

And whom he foreordained, them he also called. And whom he called, them he also justified. And whom he justified, them he also glorified.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He that spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things? God has given you Christ, his own Son, is he going to now hold anything back from you? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies. The judge himself has determined that you be justified. What counsel for the prosecution is going to get past him? Who is he that shall condemn? Why the judge himself has already declared you not guilty.

Who then has the right to condemn? Is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God who also makes intercession for us? There you have it again. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? All three persons of the Godhead combining in order to bring you through to glory, made ready for heaven. Who is going to prevent that great purpose? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, these things are not being mentioned friends as some sort of trivial theory that well you merely read about them in Christian books.

This may well be your present experience within a few months. Tribulation, anguish, persecution, famine, nakedness, or peril, or sword even as it is written for thy sake we are killed all day long, we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Oh God your word is unbreakable, stronger than the strongest granite, lasting for eternity. Governments may change, movements may come and go, churches may even fade, certainly vehicles, bodies may break down.

We thank you for your unbreakable word of assurance of your love and your care and your prayer. Lord we are glad at the end of this conference not to commit ourselves but to know that we are already committed into the hands of such a God, such a shepherd. We do thank you together now.

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