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### THEME SONG

#### *All Things Work Together for Good*

*Whatever may come to me,  
In this changeful life below,  
My Father will make it all  
Work for good to me, I know.*

*So little I understand,  
Much is veiled in mystery,  
“His ways are past finding out,”  
‘Tis enough He telleth me.*

*There’s nothing I need to fear,  
Be it loss or tears or pain,  
A blessing will follow sure,  
As the sunshine follows rain.*

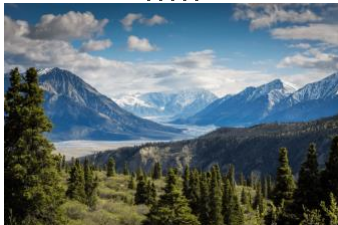
*‘Tis mine but to do His will,  
His to weave the pattern fair,  
“Tis mine to accept by faith  
What mine eyes shall see up there.*

#### *Chorus:*

*“All things work together for good,”  
for good,  
According to His purpose,  
According to His word;  
“All things work together for good,”  
for good,  
To all His redeemed ones,  
To those who love the Lord.*

**WORDS: T. O. Chisholm (1935)**

**MUSIC: L. O. Sanderson (1935)**



#### **God Meant it for Good**

Dark and evil times are not new. As far back as the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C., the people of Judah lived in wicked and depressing times, as evil King Ahaz reigned. 2 Chronicles 28 begins and ends with the same message; Ahaz did not do right in God’s sight and provoked the Lord (2 Chronicles 28:1, 25). Judah’s King Ahaz departed from the ways of David. He made gods and practiced idolatry (28:2), burned incense and sacrificed his own sons on the high places (28:2, 4), and closed the doors of the temple (28:24). He is known as the vilest King of Judah.

Dark and evil times are also part of our world today. Wickedness and violence continue to dominate the contemporary world. Wars and fraudulent governments prompt millions in our time to seek a better life elsewhere. Many of us watched the incredible video of Afghans trying to escape the Taliban takeover of Kabul last August. As some ran after the US military jet, others clung to the side of the jet as it was taking off. Thousands hoped to leave Kabul, but not all made it.

God punished Ahaz by sending five nations to invade Judah. The invasion by north Israel ended in their victory and taking captives. The casualties numbered 120,000, and another 200,000 were carried off to Samaria as prisoners of war. North Israel’s intention was to enjoy the spoils of war and enslave their captives. Scripture says, “but a prophet of the Lord named Oded was there” (28:9). His words made a difference. The leaders of Samaria listened and rescued the prisoners of war. The north Israelite oppressors became distributors of mercy to the oppressed Judeans, giving them clothing and food, meeting medical needs, and providing transportation to Jericho. What was intended for evil, God used for good as mercy was extended to the prisoners.

After the fall of Kabul on August 15, 2021, the international airport in Kabul remained the only non-Taliban

## GOD USED IT FOR GOOD

Genesis 50:20 (ESV): *20As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.*

The above scripture is the outcome of a story of bitter rivalry, jealousy, pride, spite, and retribution. As a young man, Joseph was privileged to be the “apple of his father’s eyes.” Jacob made little or no effort to conceal his favoritism for Joseph over his ten older brothers. This naturally led to their being jealous of him. Joseph did not help matters when he tattled to his father about them. Jacob went so far as to have a special coat of many colors made just for Joseph, and that fueled the brothers’ envy and anger even further. The beautiful coat was intended to be a special garment, but it turned out to be a tool of vengeance and torment.

The older brothers’ hearts became so hardened and angry at Joseph that when the opportunity came to rid themselves of him, they took action. Thanks to Reuben, Joseph was not killed as some of the brothers wanted. Instead, he was sold into slavery. The brothers then plotted to make it look like Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. They soaked his beautiful coat in animal blood and deceived their father into believing Joseph was dead. Their vengefulness began with envy, proceeded through profiting off the sale of their younger brother, and culminated with deceiving their father.

The story did not end there. Many years and much suffering later, Joseph emerged as a powerful official in Egypt. When famine struck the region, he was in a position to feed his father and his brothers’ extensive families. God used the entire situation for the good of His chosen people.

Later in history when the Jews were in bondage to King Ahasuerus, there was a young orphan girl named Esther, who was being raised by her cousin, Mordecai. She was a beautiful girl and caught the eye of the king’s eunuch, Hegai. She soon found herself in the king’s harem. King Ahasuerus loved Esther more than all the others, and Esther became the queen.

A wicked plot against the Jews brought about a decree that all Jews could be destroyed. Mordecai sent a copy of the decree to Esther urging her to plead for her people. Understandably, she was reluctant to approach the king uninvited, but Mordecai implored her, “*Do not*

controlled route out of the country. In two weeks, the US evacuated over 82,000 people from the airport. Many of these refugees are resettling in the United States. A thousand Afghans are now living in our city (Oklahoma City) trying to start new lives.

The congregation I attend, Memorial Road Church of Christ, along with many other churches and agencies, are involved in helping the refugees settle here.

On November 21, 2021, our congregation hosted 400 Afghans in our building for a traditional Thanksgiving meal. Afghan refugees sat at tables with Christians, as we welcomed them to our city and learned of the trauma and suffering they had encountered in the previous weeks. What the Taliban intended for evil, God is using for good.

Our church is currently assisting 30 families in their resettlement. This support includes furnishing apartments as they become available, supplying many household items, taking them meals, providing clothing for the families, inviting them into our homes for a meal, helping them find jobs, teaching them English, and driving them to medical facilities as needed.

The family my husband, Harold, and I sat with at the Thanksgiving dinner, were from near Kabul. They have 5 children ages 2 to 13 and the wife was pregnant. With Google Translate, we asked the due date of the baby and learned it was due in a week. Seven days later, I received a text with a photo saying, baby Sara has arrived! Last week we went to see Sara and take the family a few gifts. Like all children, the gifts brought smiles to their faces. The 13-year-old looked forward to starting school the next day, and the parents were thankful that baby Sara was healthy and born in Oklahoma City.

We do not know what is ahead for these refugees. We do not know if more will be coming to our city. We do not know exactly what this looks like for our church. We do not know what this means for our international ministry. But some Afghans are asking questions about our God and the Bible.

A few months ago, they were among many experiencing oppression and persecution from the Taliban. Today, God is using Christians in our city to bring hope and mercy. The Taliban meant it for evil, but God is using it for good.

Sally Shank, Edmond, Oklahoma



*think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. <sup>14</sup>For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"* Esther 4:13-14.

The king was so pleased with Esther that he asked her what reward she wanted from him and offered half his kingdom. Her reply was, *"If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be granted me for my wish, and my people for my request. <sup>4</sup>For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have been silent, for our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king."*

The king instructed that another decree be written, *<sup>11</sup>saying that the king allowed the Jews who were in every city to gather and defend their lives, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate any armed force of any people or province that might attack them, children and women included, and to plunder their goods, <sup>12</sup>on one day throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus... (Esther 8:11)*

What had become a dangerous situation for all the Jewish people in that land subsided, and they could now defend themselves and their families. Ironically, *<sup>17</sup>And in every province and in every city, wherever the king's command and his edict reached, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many from the peoples of the country **declared themselves Jews**, for fear of the Jews had fallen on them,* Esther 8:17.

The story as written above is condensed. God took a dangerously desperate situation and turned it into a victorious circumstance. It became the annual Feast of Purim commemorating the deliverance of the Jews from Haman's evil plot. God used a little orphan girl to save his people from annihilation.

Do you ever feel small and insignificant? Or worse, useless? Do not ever underestimate God's power to use the least of us to achieve His ends. Joseph and Esther were both used by God to achieve His purpose. You are useful in His kingdom.

Evelyn Waite, Rolla, Missouri

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## Just Wait

Our first foster child was a three-year-old, profoundly retarded little girl who still did not eat table food, could not sit up nor walk, and was non-verbal. She was in our regional diagnostic center and the authorities had 3 days to find a home for her or she would be sent back to her negligent home. My husband was the deacon over our benevolent program at church, and when he and I were made aware of the situation, we called everyone we knew trying to find a home for this child. Nobody felt capable.

On the morning of the third day, my husband came home from his night job and asked what I had learned. I reported no success. He sat with me and prayed and said, "You know we cannot do this. We have two girls of our own, and I work nights. I would not be able to help you very much at all. Besides, my worst fear is having a handicapped child." I agreed with him with a heavy heart. I knew he was right. We prayed again, and he went to bed.

Thirty minutes later he came back downstairs and asked, "Do you want to call the caseworker?" My immediate response was, "Yes!"

That began a race to be licensed as a foster parent, followed by twenty-six months of intense therapy for our new daughter. That loveable little girl learned to eat table foods, feed herself, sit up, then crawl, and ultimately to walk. Every small accomplishment was cause for celebration, and even laughter. We giggled when we realized she could finally walk across the room if I held even one M&M. But if I had no M&M, she would not take the first step. Eventually, the freedom of walking was incentive enough for her to move, and we had another celebration. Life was good.

It was good until the day we were informed the state laws regarding retarded residents had changed. Now every level of a facility had to have at least one thirty-six-inch door that swung out. We lived in a house with four levels, and two of those had no door at all and no way to add them. Our sweet little girl had to be moved. We were devastated. We prayed, we explored options, and we prayed some more.

I had met a lady at the ARC preschool who knew our little girl and she voiced interest. I knew this family had two boys, one enrolled at the ARC preschool. I told the caseworker, and licensing began, and soon our little girl was moved. Her biological mother still maintained monthly supervised visits, and we were able to visit at times. After a couple of years, the biological mother was

convinced to relinquish her parental rights in order to secure better services for her little girl. Our little girl's mother loved her deeply but was not physically or financially able to care for her full-time. It truly was a gut-wrenching decision for her.

She ultimately agreed to an open adoption, which meant she would be able to visit, and even have some weekend visits while her adoptive parents had a bit of respite. As time went on, our girl learned sign language, learned to do simple household tasks, was potty trained, and was a happy, well-adjusted child.

When she reached adulthood, she worked in a sheltered workshop and moved to a group home with another lady roommate. Her adoptive parents and siblings collected both women and the biological mother and they all went to brunch every weekend. She enjoyed a bit of independence, but still had the support of both her biological mother and her adoptive family.

We were so sad when our little girl was moved from us, but we prayed, and God certainly answered our prayers in a much different way than we hoped. He provided a much better answer, because I am not sure I would have been knowledgeable enough to provide all that child's needs, but her adoptive parents could and did.

God is so good, all the time. Sometimes it is really hard for us to be patient. We just need to wait for God to work things out to our good.

Wilburta Arrowood, Napoleonville, Louisiana

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### THE PURE IN HEART

The 6<sup>th</sup> beatitude is quite amazing really—and a challenge to all of us:

**“Blessed are the pure in heart, ♥ for they shall see God.” (Matthew 5:8)**

One commentary said, “So the heart is utterly crucial to Jesus. What we are in the deep, private recesses of our hearts and lives is what He cares about most. Jesus did not come into the world simply because we have some bad habits that need to be broken. He came into the world because we have such dirty hearts that need to be purified. The aim of Jesus Christ is not to reform the manners of society, but to change the hearts of sinners like you and me from the inside out.”

For example, Jesus would not be satisfied with a society in which there were no acts of adultery. You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I (Jesus) say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his

heart” (Matthew 5:27-28) Wow! Jesus' comments often left people with their jaws open.

The “Pure in Heart” are those poor in spirit hearts, those God has cleansed since they realized they could not do it in their own power. He delivered them from the consequences and power of sin through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Those who believe this promise will fight for purity in their own lives, not with their own power, but with their will combined with the Holy Spirit's power. They see God with the eyes of their heart today as they enjoy a deeper and deeper fellowship with Him, and they will see Him in eternity. Blessed are those with that goal in mind!

An Old Testament verse close to this beatitude is in Psalm 24: “Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.” (Psalm 24:3-4)

You can see this idea of purity in the book of James: “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you men of double mind.” (James 4:8)

“Create in me a pure heart, Oh God, and renew a right spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:10)

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart.” (Matthew 22:37)

“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew Himself strong in the behalf of *them* whose heart *is* perfect toward Him.” (2 Chronicles 16:9)

“God made no distinction between us and them but purified their hearts by faith.” (Acts 15:9)

God is the one who purifies the heart, therefore, “trust in the Lord with all your heart.” (Prov. 3:5)

Marilyn Pecinovsky, Cresco, Iowa

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