



PaÁi~ c@kÁ ^\ ÁËÖç^i^ c@ * Áa] ^} • Á; ! Áü^ æ [}

February 1, 2025 *Everything Happens for a Reason?*

Scripture: Deuteronomy 30:19-20a

Then Moses said to the Israelites, “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days.”

Cause and effect—but God’s not always the cause

MONDAY 2.2.25 Galatians 6:7-10

The phrase “everything happens for a reason” holds a half-truth. In this world, there IS some cause for every effect. Many Christians hold: Everything that happens is God’s will. It is not uncommon to hear people put it this way: “Everything happens for a reason.” That is not Biblical. Some bad effects, like severe storms, are just “the way life works.” Galatians noted that in other cases our choices, not God’s acts, cause bad effects.

- In the first part of Galatians 6, Paul talked about relationships, about ways the Galatian Christians could help and bless one another. In other words, he talked about choices we control, not natural disasters (e.g. tornadoes or earthquakes) or diseases nobody “sowed.” When have you seen your choices, or those of someone close to you, “sow” one or more negative effects? Were those effects God’s doing?
- Our choices can cause good effects, too. But verse 9 said doing good takes focused effort. “The first verb puts emphasis on losing interest (for example, “spiritless”) and the second on becoming discouraged or relaxing one’s efforts” (*UBS Translator’s Handbook on Galatians*). Have you ever gotten tired of doing good? If so, what helped renew your energy to bless others?

Prayer: King Jesus, I want to sow love, caring and light through my choices each day. Keep me growing into a person who is mainly a cause of good effects in the lives of others. Amen.

Job’s “friend:” “Everything happens for a reason”

TUESDAY 2.3.25 Job 4:1-9

Suffering has always raised deep spiritual questions. Job, the Hebrew poetic drama, came from roots that seem to go back more than 1000 years before Christ. The ancient drama showed Job facing awful loss and agony. Though at first his friends sat with him in silence, they soon began to offer simple, black-and-white answers to explain his suffering.

- Job’s “friend” Eliphaz asked him bluntly, “What innocent person has ever perished?” He clearly believed God was the reason for everything bad that had happened to Job, to teach

him a lesson for something he'd done wrong. Have you ever asked the same question, inwardly or outwardly, about something bad that happens to you or someone close to you?

- Careful readers saw the answer to Eliphaz's question before he even asked it. Job 2:7 made it plain that Job's troubles came from "The Adversary" or "Accuser" (Hebrew "*ha satan*," a title rather than a personal name), not from God. What human or natural forces have you seen cause suffering or pain that God did not desire?

Prayer: Lord, Eliphaz held a very simple, black-and-white idea. At times I wish things were that simple. But you taught Job, and want to teach me, to think more deeply about suffering and life. Help me learn from you attentively and perceptively. Amen.

God to Job's "friend:" "You didn't speak correctly"

WEDNESDAY 2.3.25 Job 42:1-8

Starting in Job 38, the drama showed God speaking to Job. Pastor Hamilton wrote, "[God's] answer is both beautiful and unsatisfying ... God does not explain suffering. Instead, God describes life and reasserts that God is the creator of it all." So we find Job affirming trust in God even when he couldn't fully understand everything. Then God rebuked, not Job, but Eliphaz, the others and their simplistic answers: "You haven't spoken about me correctly."

- Job realized that he needed more than the "why" answers he had demanded from God (and which he never received). God said Job's friends' answers fell short—"you haven't spoken about me correctly" (Job 42:7). Have well-meaning friends ever given glib explanations of your suffering? How can God's caring presence with you help more than any abstract explanation?
- Pastor David McKenna summed up the ending of Job this way: "Can he affirm his faith in God knowing that evil is still permitted to work in the world? Can he put his trust in God who will not answer his question why? Even more personally, can he believe in God who will give him no promise of immunity?" Job, the drama said, decided that he could affirm that faith and trust. Can you?

Prayer: Lord God, so many times I think what I want are answers, not realizing that the answers may be beyond my understanding. Thank you for always giving me your love and grace, which are what I most deeply need. Amen.

Moses learned God's true character

THURSDAY 2.4.25 Exodus 34:5-9

In Exodus 32, Israel failed badly, making and worshipping a gold statue of a bull, an Egyptian god (of all things!). In the violent, revenge-oriented ancient Middle East, the Israelites found it hard to grasp what God was really like. Yet, almost like an unexpected harmony in a dissonant symphony, God (unlike Egypt's gods) showed Moses a divine character based on the profound realities of love and forgiveness.

- Neither Egyptians nor Canaanites believed their gods loved them. They certainly didn't envision their "gods" making any good promises to them. Instead, they tended to offer sacrifices mostly to try to stay on their fickle gods' good side, hoping to avoid the gods'

capricious, hurtful actions. Have you ever known (or been) a person who tends to see God in that way? How does that view affect our ability to love or trust God?

- By contrast, when God revealed his character to Moses, “compassionate and merciful” were the key characteristics in that revelation. In verse 10, even after Israel’s ugly failure in Exodus 32, God told Moses, “I now make a covenant.” Have any of your experiences with human “trust” relationships, good or bad, affected your ability to trust that God’s love for you is truly steadfast? In what ways have you sensed that God sticks with you through both good and bad?

Prayer: Lord God, please give me a thirst to know you better. I’m so thankful that you want to be known, loved and trusted! Amen.

Jesus' clear teaching: what God does and doesn't do

FRIDAY 2.5.25 Matthew 5:43-45, Luke 11:11-13, 13:1-5

In Jesus’ day, as in ours, many people were inclined to see tragedy and suffering as a divine punishment and/or object lesson. Jesus consistently said they “got it wrong.” He recognized the randomness of some tragedies, and the role of evil in creating others. He was not much concerned with assigning blame, but in bringing healing. He taught that, like a good father, God takes delight in giving his children good gifts, not awful, hurtful ones.

- Even much of our legal language calls many different kinds of disasters “acts of God.” If, as Jesus suggested, collapsing towers and killings by foreign soldiers are not “acts of God,” divine punishments for wrongdoing, what does cause them? What do you think Jesus would tell a grieving relative of someone killed in tragedies like those?
- Pastor Hamilton wrote, “God does not inject cancer cells into people or cause other diseases—or take babies away from their mothers, or send cars careening into one another. Much of what we blame God for is the result of ... the realities of an imperfect world ... God accepts these realities, but God does not initiate them.” What makes it important to you that Jesus pictured God as a kind, loving, merciful parent, not a monster?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you came to teach us, and to show us in action, what God is like. When you met sinners, you loved them rather than attacking them. Ingrain in my heart your picture of a God I can trust and serve. Amen.

God can bring good even from bad things

SATURDAY 2.6.25 Romans 8:22-28

The apostle Paul faced many hardships (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:22-28). We never find him asking, “Why did God send that mob to attack me?” or anything like that. We never find him sighing, with resignation, “Nero’s madness and injustice are just God’s will. Everything happens for a reason.” But Paul did express a profound trust that even when bad things occur, things God never wished for, God’s power could and did force even those bad things to ultimately serve a good end.

- Paul wrote in verse 24, “We were saved in hope.” It’s pretty natural for us to want our faith journey to “pay off” right now, but in fact it doesn’t always do that. To what extent are you

willing and able to live in hope, even when the present is different than you would want it to be? Try, like Paul in 2 Corinthians, to list the tough things you've faced. Take that list to God, look for the ways it may have already produced good in your life, and ask God to keep working good for you even out of bad things. In what ways can doing that help to nurture hope in your heart?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for the divine power and ingenuity with which you made the evil of your cross into the central act that saves us from the power of evil. Thank you for promising that your creativity and ingenuity also work in my life. Amen.

Family Activity: We experience God through Jesus, the Living Word and through the Bible as the written Word. Create a shoebox or photo box filled with Bible verses of hope. Using colored paper, markers, ribbon, magazine cut-outs, family photos and other fun materials, decorate the box to represent your family and your faith journey. Write some favorite Bible verses on colorful strips of paper and place them in the box. (The Book of Psalms is a great place to find verses of praise and thanksgiving as well as hope-filled promises.) Once a day, possibly at mealtime, pull a strip from the box and share the passage aloud. Ask older children and youth to also find it in the Bible. Thank God for the gifts of faith and hope.