

Everything Happens For A Reason by Jeff Strite

Romans 8:17-8:28

OPEN: Over the past couple of weeks we've been talking about stupid things that even Christians believe. Of course, these things that people believe don't seem "stupid" to them at the time. In fact many of these things people believe seem perfectly reasonable... almost Biblical.

And that is particularly true of the statement we're going to be looking at today. That statement is: "Everything happens for a reason."

Have you ever heard someone say that?
Have you ever said it?
I think I may have too.

It sounds almost Biblical... but it's not.
And we'll explain why in just a moment.

Now, when people say "everything happens for a reason" they mean well. What they're meaning to say is: God takes care of everything in a believer's life. And since, God takes care of everything then nothing happens by chance. Thus, everything happens for a reason. Everything that happens in your life is ALL part of God's plan.

ILLUS: Someone who believed this kind of thinking once said to Dr. J. Vernon McGee, "I have been studying the Bible, and I believe I am absolutely safe in God's hand. No matter what I do, or how dangerous it may be, he is going to protect me. If I stepped out into a busy street against a red light I would be perfectly safe if my time had not yet come." Dr. McGee replied, "If you are foolish enough to step out into traffic against a red light at the rush hour, brother... your time has come!"

(Pause)

Some time ago I saw a sign on Facebook which said:
"Everything happens for a reason.
Sometimes it's because you're stupid and make bad decisions."

ILLUS: Now, the phrase "everything happens for a reason" is relatively harmless until you run into someone who thinks it's a good thing to say a funeral. There's a true story of a woman who was leaving an evening church service and fell down the flight of steps outside the church and broke her hip. She had hip surgery, but instead of healing, she got progressively worse and until - a few short days later - she died.

At the visitation, the preacher stood beside the bereaved husband. And many people came up to the man who'd lost his wife to offer their sympathies.

- Some tried to console the husband: "God must have had a plan for this, so accept it."
- Another said, "It was God's will and we must live by it."

- Still another said, "Somehow God planned this to test your faith!!"
- And still another said, "There is a silver lining in every cloud. You will find God's reason behind this eventually."

Do you know what each of those friends was saying?

They were saying: "Everything happens for a reason."

That almost sounds pious, until you consider the flip side of their meaning:

"Your wife died... because God had planned for her to die."

Does that sound like a good thing to tell someone?

Of course not!

And the preacher left that funeral home filled with anger. He raged against their "babbling" (as he put it) and he went to the study and rewrote the beginning of his funeral sermon.

The next day, he began his message with these words:

"My God does not push old ladies down church steps!!!"

Then he proceeded to explain that God cannot be blamed or accused for all the brokenness of this world. "If God is the author of death, how, how can He be at the same time the author of life as shown thru the resurrection we celebrate each Sunday..."

Is God the God of the living, or the God of the dead? You cannot have it both ways."

(Tim Zingale, sermoncentral.com speaking of a funeral conducted by the late Maurice "Mo" White)

But now, the question is this: how did people arrive at this kind of thinking?

How could they possibly come to the kind of theology that would imply that God would push little old ladies down church steps?

ILLUS: Back when I attended a secular University, I took several classes in Philosophy. Of all the things I learned in those classes the one concept that made the most lasting impression on me was explained to me by an Assistant Professor.

He told me that the best way to understand how people think something through is to compare it to a mathematical equation.

He explained that most people reason like this:

"Proposition 1: A equals B

Propositions 2: B equals C

Conclusion: Therefore A must equal C"

The professor then explained that by the time people have arrived at their conclusion it is hard to shake their convictions because they believe the conclusion to be the logical outcome of the propositions they started with. Thus, in order to point out where their conclusions were wrong you needed to show where one or more of their propositions were faulty.

When it comes to the "everything happens for a reason" mentality, the reasoning goes like this:

1. God has a plan for our lives.

That's true.

2. And God has made various promises to us... such as

"he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." Psalm 91:11-12

And that's true.

Therefore since God has made us that promise, and God has a plan for us, the only logical conclusion (they reason) is:

God will protect us in all things.

And therefore, anything that happens to us is part of His plan for our lives.

Now, the problem is – this thinking is sooo close to true Scriptural teachings that it actually makes sense.

KINDA.

So, let examine each of their propositions for a few moments.

First, it IS true that God has a plan for your life.

One of my favorite passages of Scripture is Ephesians 2:10 tells us that (once we become Christians) "...we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

God has things prepared for you and I to do.

He has a plan for our lives, a purpose for us to accomplish.

And once we accept that... once we believe it... once we have faith that this is what God has in mind for us... then we're capable of doing all kinds of things

ILLUS: There was a recent study done by researchers at Stanford University who tested 900 participants. They found just "thinking" about God has a powerful impact on people's willingness to "seek out and take risks... because they view God as providing security against potential negative outcomes."

(<http://www.psychologicalscience.org/index.php/news/releases/thinking-of-god-makes-people-bigger-risk-takers.html>)

In other words, even for people who weren't driven by faith who were simply "THINKING about God" - there was a belief that God was THERE for them. And therefore (since He was "there") they felt more willing to take certain risks in life they wouldn't otherwise have considered..

Years ago I heard someone ask: What would you do if you believed you could not fail?

That study from Stanford essentially was saying that – if you believe God approves of that dream then you're more likely to take a shot at doing it. Because you BELIEVE God will have your back.

But in Scripture, God does you one better. In Scripture, God essentially says "Not only will believing I've got your back make you more confident, but if (what you plan to do) is in My will, then...

I WILL have your back.

I WILL be there for you.

Our faith in God's faithfulness makes us live our lives in an expectation of the fact that He has a plan for our lives... and it's going to be something exciting. It's kind of like children sitting around the Christmas tree on Christmas morning. All those gifts lie under the tree and they can't "see" what's inside the gifts. But they just "know" it's going to be something great.

In 2 Corinthians 5:7 God tells us – as Christians – "We live by faith, not by sight."

So, when we do THIS right –

When we live as those who believe God has a plan for our lives.

When we live as those who believe that God has the power to put that plan into effect.

And when we step out in faith and do things that just don't make any sense

Then we live our lives looking for something we can't see.

We live by faith, not by sight.

Or, another way of saying this is:

"An attitude of Faith will succeed even in the face of Facts."

ILLUS: Dr. Karl Menninger once observed, "Attitudes are more important than facts."

The great men and women of Scripture had the attitude that God had a plan and they obeyed. Once they accepted that God had a plan... and that God had the power to make it work. Nothing else mattered.

When Moses faced the might of Egypt what did he have in his hand?

A shepherd's staff.

Really? That's all he had?

That shouldn't have worked? But it did.

When David faced Goliath, what did he have in his hand?

A sling and a rock? Seriously? That's all he had?

That shouldn't have worked. But it did.

When Gideon and his 300 soldiers faced an army of 135,000 men, what did they have in their hands?

Trumpets and torches. That's it? That's all they had?

That shouldn't have worked, but it did.

Those things shouldn't have worked!!

The enemy was bigger than they were. Stronger than they were!

But the God of those faith-filled people was stronger than their enemy.
And because of their attitude – because they BELIEVED God had a plan, and that God had the power to back that plan - they became victorious.

So when you and I believe God has a plan for our lives and that He has the power to back that plan with His power. And if that plan is according to the Will of God, then we really can't lose!!!

Now the FACT that God has a plan for your life goes hand in glove with the FACT that God has given you all kinds of promises.

The Bible is filled with 1000s of promises that God has made.

I could preach for years just on the promises God has made to you and I!

And one of the most famous and beloved those promises is found in our text this morning:
"... we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28

God will work for the good of those who love Him

In HOW MANY things will God work for the good of those who love Him?

In ALL things!

Almost sounds like "everything happens for a purpose" doesn't it?

But now, let's ask a couple questions here.

Is this verse saying that ALL things are good?

No, it doesn't do it.

Is this verse saying that God "caused" all things to happen in your life?

Again, no – that's not what it says.

But what it IS saying is this:

It doesn't make any difference.

It doesn't matter if what has happened in your life was caused by God or not. And it doesn't matter if what has happened in your life is a good thing. No matter what has happened in your life you serve a BIG God who has BIG plans for your life.

And no matter WHY something has happened in your life ALL things (good things/ bad things/

things caused by God/ things not caused by God) ALL things will work together for good for you.

I will state categorically: Not everything in this world happens for a reason - unless you're going to say that the reason is that people are sometimes stupid and make bad decisions.

Remember the story of Cain and Abel?

Cain and Abel offer a sacrifice to God, and God rejects Cain's offering.

How does Cain respond to this rejection?

He gets angry and he kills his brother.
Was that's God's will?
Did God cause that to happen?

Let's fast-forward a few centuries to the days of Moses.
The Israelites come to the very border of the Promised Land and they send in 12 spies to scout out the land. Two were good and 10 were bad. The two faith filled men came back and said that this land was everything God had promised and all they had to do was go in and take it. But the other 10 were afraid and said that they were like grasshoppers in comparison to those giants. And their fear spread throughout the camp and the people refused to go into Palestine.
Was that God's will that they would refuse to go in?
Did God cause that to happen?

A few centuries later we read about a great king of Israel named David.
David sees the wife of Uriah bathing on a nearby rooftop and sins by having her come over to his palace, committing adultery with her.
Was that God's will?
Did God cause that to happen?

Answer: NO!!!!

Sometimes the reason bad things happen to us is that people do stupid things.
Sometimes it's because others make bad decisions.
Sometimes it's because the people around are sinners and they do sinful things.
Or, sometimes the reason things happen to us is that we live in a fallen world.

But God says – it doesn't matter why something happened.
I can make all things work together for good in your life IF you love ME and are called according to My purpose.

It helps to realize that Romans 8:28 isn't just a one verse out in the middle of nowhere.
It's part of a whole chapter of things God wanted us to see and understand.
And the backdrop for the promise we just read is found in Romans 8:17-18:

“Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”

What that is saying is this: as a Christian you're going to suffer.
Or, as Jesus said – in this world you will have trouble.

And that suffering isn't always going to be part of God's "plan" for our lives.
I mean, sometimes we'll suffer because we've sinned and God needs to correct us.
But other times our suffering will happen because we live in a fallen world.
Or because we live amongst sinful people that won't like us.

Not everything that happens, happens because it is God's plan for our lives.
The "everything happens for a reason" mindset ends up blaming God for stuff He doesn't do.

He doesn't push little old ladies down stairs cases.
He doesn't make it so we make bad choices in our lives.
He doesn't cause bad people to do bad things.
God doesn't do stuff like that.
God doesn't make it so that everything happens for a reason...

But What God Does Do is...
He makes everything that does happen... have a reason.

When you and I act in faith.
When you and I commit our lives to Him.
When you and I bathe what we do in prayer.
When we humble ourselves in His presence.
Then God makes everything that DOES happen... to have a reason.

What happens in our lives will mean something, because God will MAKE it mean something.

CLOSE: One of the best illustrations I can think of to help us understand this concept comes from Scripture. The Bible tells us of one of the greatest kings of Israel.

His name was David.

David was a great king, a man after God's own heart.

And a very righteous man.

In fact, you can tell the kind of righteousness he had by reading the book of Psalms (of which he was the major author)

And he became a great warrior and a great leader.

Not only did he face and killed Goliath, but even after he became King... he led armies against enemies of Israel.

But then one day, David didn't go to war with his armies.

He stayed home to watch the bed and bath channel on the rooftop across the way.

He saw Bathsheba bathing on her rooftop - and he wanted her.

So he sent for her... and slept with her... and he had a good time.

In fact, you get the impression he had several nights of pleasure her.

But then, one day Bathsheba says "David, honey, I'm pregnant."

And now David has a problem.

Bathsheba is a married woman and if it's found out that he's the father of her child, he would lose his prestige as a king... and she'd lose her life. They'd stone her to death.

So David decides on a plan.

All this time, her husband has been on the war-front. He's not slept with her.

So David sends for Uriah to come back to Jerusalem to be a messenger for him. While Uriah is there, David suggests he go to spend some time with his own wife.

But Uriah is a righteous man. More righteous than David.

And he refuses to go to his wife because he feels it would be unfair to his brothers in arms if he should enjoy the pleasures of home while they are suffering on the battlefield. And Uriah sleeps at the door of the palace.

Now things are getting serious.

David sends Uriah back to his general with sealed orders.

The orders? The general was to put Uriah at the front where the battle was the thickest.

And when the time was right, the general was to draw back all of the other soldiers and leave Uriah to die. And that's what they did. And Uriah died.

So David has succeeded in covering his tracks. No one will now know that he and Bathsheba have committed adultery, and he is now free to take her as his wife.

He's gotten away with it.

(Knock on pulpit)

At the door was the prophet of God named Nathan. And Nathan had urgent news for the King. He told David there had been a "poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him."

But next door to that poor man was a wealthy farmer who had a friend come and visit. And even though this rich man had sheep and cattle of his own, "he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him."

And the Bible says "David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this must die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity." (II Samuel 12:3-6)

And then Nathan spoke some of the most powerful words ever said:

Nathan said to David, "You are the man!" (II Samuel 12:7)

And Nathan told David, the child would die and the sword would not depart from his house because of the evil that he had done in the eyes of God.

David had been stupid, and he'd made a bad choice...

But then David made a different choice.

Unlike many of the other kings in the Old Testament, David humbled himself under the hand of God. He repented of his sins. In fact he wrote an entire Psalm dedicated to asking God's forgiveness for this evil thing he had done. Some of the words of Psalm 51 say:

"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great

compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin... wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me." Psalm 51:1-2; 7b-12

When David sinned with Bathsheba and had Uriah (her husband and one of his best friends) killed because of his lust for sex and power. He had been was stupid and he'd made a bad decision.

But God took what David had done which was evil... He took that which David had done which was NOT a good thing... and made it so that even this evil thing could be turned to good.

You see – because David humbled himself before God
Because David stopped making excuses and hiding his sin
Because David repented and changed his life
God showed Himself faithful and made it so that all things worked together for good (even these bad things/even these things God did not create).

"All things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purposes."

Do you believe that?

(Pause)

Does anybody know who the next King of Israel was after David?

Solomon.

Does anybody know who Solomon's mama was?

Bathsheba.

Do you see what God did there?

He took the evil that David had done, and because David repented of that evil, God made "all things work together for good, so that even this 2nd child of David and Bathsheba became a King of Israel. A king who stood for God.

The point is this: We all mess up. We all sin and fall short of the glory of God. We're all broken people who do things we'd just as soon forget. Not everything we've done was done for a "reason". But God can take that which we've done... and make it have a reason. He take what we've messed up and make it valuable.

But first we must give those things to Him.

And the first thing we must give to Him... is ourselves.