

January 10, 2021
Farmville Baptist Church
Everything Happens for a Reason ó or does it?
Deuteronomy 30:19-20a, Psalm 8
Tracy Hartman

This morning we are beginning a five week sermon series entitled Half-truths - let's trade them for the Whole Truth! I'll be drawing on Adam Hamilton's book called Half-truths as we work our way through this series. If we're honest, all of us occasionally use half-truths, and we can find scripture passages to support nearly every one of the half-truths we'll discuss ó just like we can find Scripture to support just about anything if we don't read it in the proper context. Our goal in this series is to interpret these sayings and the Scriptures in light of the person of Jesus and his teachings, as well as the wisdom of scholars and our own life experiences to get a fuller picture of truth.

Why is it important to examine and question these statements that so many of us have held dear for many years? Mostly, because these half-truths can hurt people and lead them to conclusions about God that not only are untrue, but can push people away from God. Another reason is that some of these half-truths can keep us from thinking and dealing with complex issues and even justify our own biases and prejudices.ⁱ

I fully expect that some of us will experience struggle and resistance as we move through the next several weeks, and that's okay. But I hope that as we journey through Epiphany, the season of light, that this series will lead us all to a fuller knowledge of the truth of God and God's word. So without further ado, let's dig in.

Let's begin with a show of hands this morning. How many of you have ever said, or had someone say to you, "Everything happens for a reason?" This statement is fully true if we mean that we live a world of cause and effect. The most blunt statement I have heard related to this

statement is "Everything happens for a reason: and sometimes the reason is you're stupid and make bad decisions." Put more gently, our actions do create consequences- our own choices have results - either good or bad.

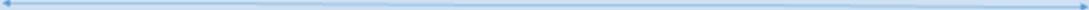
However, when we say everything happens for a reason, we're usually speaking in response to suffering, aren't we? Our intentions are good -- we want to console someone who is grieving so we say "It was meant to be," or "It must have been their time," or "It must have been God's will." These statements come from the assumption that while we may not yet understand it, all the events in our lives unfold according to God's predetermined plan. Since God is in charge of everything, this line of reasoning goes, whatever happens reflects the will and purposes of God. Honestly, some people are comforted by the certainty of this belief system, but if we are honest, there are some real problems with holding this theology.

If we take this line of thinking to its extreme, it becomes silly, "God meant for my team to win/lose the World Series or Super Bowl." On a larger scale, it can raise much more troubling questions. Did God really will the death of millions of Jews during the Holocaust or hundreds of people in mass shootings, plane crashes and natural disasters? If so, is this the kind of God we would want to follow and put our total trust in?

We are not alone in our struggle with this issue, theologians have debating it for centuries; coming down on very different sides of the issue.

Views of God's Providence

Reformer
John Calvin



- God wills or causing everything
- This included everything from the weather to a woman's fertility in a pre-scientific era
- Even our thoughts and feelings are governed by God.
- Most importantly our eternal destiny was pre-determined by God.

Problems with Calvin's Views

- God is responsible for everything – including every tragedy.
 - Would a loving God really do this?
- It eliminates the need for personal responsibility for our actions
 - It leads to indifference – whatever will be will be – why work to change it?
 - We can't excuse a poor choice by saying it was a part of God's plan
- God does give humanity dominion and choices– Psalm 8, Deut. 30
- Much of the Biblical story is about humans misusing their freedom and God working to redeem us and the mess we make

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Deists Founding Fathers

- God created everything
- Set the laws of nature in motion
- Gave humans dominion
- God stepped away from it all – like a watchmaker

Problems with Deism

- Deism leaves no room for God to be at work in the world at all.
 - Scripture tells us God did liberate the Israelites from Egypt
 - God did speak through the prophets
 - God did send Jesus to save us
 - God does work in and through each of us.

The Truth Lies in the Middle

- God is Sovereign
 - God wrote the laws of nature
 - God has an ultimate plan for humanity
 - We are called to be God's hands and voice in the world
- God gives us Freedom
 - God does not violate our free will – our choices are what make us human
- God Works through us in the world.

What about Romans 8:28?

“We know that God works all things together for good for the ones who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

- Paul doesn't say that God makes everything happen or that everything that happens is part of God's plan.
- He DOES say that no matter what happens, God will somehow bring good out of it.

Suffering is not God's desire for us, but it occurs in the process of life. Suffering is not given to teach us something, but through it we may learn. Suffering is not given to punish us, but sometimes it is the consequence of our sin or poor judgement. Suffering does not occur

because our faith is weak, but through it our faith may be strengthened. God does not depend on human suffering to achieve God's purposes, but sometimes through suffering, God's purposes are achieved. Suffering can either destroy us, or it can add meaning to our life.ⁱⁱ

Adam Hamilton writes, "Between the micromanaging God who causes everything to happen and the absentee landlord God who is not involved in our lives is a picture of God who grants us freedom and allows us to take risks. It is a picture of God who does not cause tragedy but uses it, it is a picture of God who can directly and supernaturally intervene but usually works indirectly through people. It is a picture of God who, through the power of Jesus' resurrection, gives us assurance that in the end "Death has been swallowed up by victory." Let us claim this whole truth, and proclaim together, Thanks be to God.

ⁱ Adam Hamilton, *Half-truths*, p. 10

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, p. 44.