

Everything happens for a reason.

By Pastor Mandy

There's cause and effect. What comes up must come down. There is a chain reaction. Actions have consequences. Now, when my sons were younger, they are 23 and 19 now. But when they were younger, we talked a lot about actions having consequences and usually it was like, okay, here's what happens if you are late for school, or here's what's happened.

If you don't brush your teeth or here's what's happened, what will happen if you drink too much soda or don't get enough sleep? And a lot of times, these things that we would talk about were their own actions and the consequences that they would have based on their actions. But we also did the whole what-if game.

Sure. If you're a parent, you understand this. Okay, well, what if a stranger approaches you? What if your friend wants to drive you home? But they've been drinking and so on. So my youngest son, his name is Lex, and he's funny. He's quite good if you don't know him. But once you get to know him, he is like, really funny, He's really witty.

And he says the funniest thing sometimes. So a couple of weeks ago, he was getting ready to fly to Texas, and he'd flown by himself before. And so that's not a big deal. He's flown at times with Tom and I, too. And so I knew that he could do it. But he is still 19. And with the number of flights that have been delayed and canceled recently, I wanted to talk to him about some what ifs and so I said, Lex what if you get to Chicago and you missed you miss your connecting flight?

And he could have answered me with what he actually would have done. He could have said, Dumb mom, I know what to do. But instead he quickly said, Well, I guess I'll live in Chicago then. And he laughed. So we know as adults that when things happen in life we have to react and we have to adjust to the things that happen.

The unexpected. But sometimes we want to know why it happened. Does everything happen for a reason? Now? If it's cause and effect that we're talking about, then yes, but if it's God's plan that we're talking about, that may mean a different answer. Is it God's plan for planes to be delayed? Is it God's plan for a plane to crash?

Was it God's plan for someone to take a plane and fly it into a building, killing thousands? Now, this is where the saying everything happens for a reason starts to become a little muddy. When we say to someone everything happens for a reason, it can bring comfort to someone. Sometimes we say it to ourselves. Everything happens for a reason.

And the idea that everything happens for a reason gives us this sense of order and control and a belief that there is a greater plan out there that's guiding our lives. This belief can help us cope with difficult situations as we try to convince ourselves that there must be some sort of purpose for our suffering. This belief can be reassuring, but it's essential for us to understand it has limitations, and we'll talk through those things and think through those limitations through the lens of what we know about God, through Scripture and our own experiences.

So there certainly is some truth to everything happens for a reason. God is in control, supported by Scripture, but we'll never fully be able to comprehend all of this. But when we say everything happens

for a reason, are we saying that actions have consequences, that there's a cause and effect happening in our world? Or are we really saying that everything that happens is God's will?

Now, this is something that I've learned as a pastor. I've learned that sometimes there are appropriate times to say things, and then if sometimes there are not appropriate times to say things. And I struggle holding back when I'm sitting with a family and they're going through an awful tragedy, an accident or something that has happened in their family. And somebody in the family says, well, this must be God's plan.

And it's really hard for me to not saying say something. But it is not the right time for me to say to them at that point, well, let's think about this theologically. Right. The right thing for me to do in that moment is to sit with them and allow them to grieve and then move along with them in their journey.

And then maybe when the time is right, we can talk about what that actually means. Now, if I'm sitting with somebody and we're we hear about some sort of news, some sort of event, some sort of tragedy that happened maybe across our city or across our country or across the world, right when we're removed from that tragedy and somebody says, well, you know, it must have been God's plan for that to happen.

I can't usually stop myself from saying, do you really, really believe that this is the kind of God that we serve? Because if my child is spared in a school shooting, I want to believe that it's God's will that my child lived. But I would never say that sitting next to the parent whose child did not survive, Does God really want kids to die?

Does he need them as angels? Did God take them to teach a lesson to those of us who remain? No, I don't believe that is so. And I'm fearful that when we say we as Christians say to people who may not know God's love, who may not know God's grace, and if we say to them everything happens for a reason, I'm fearful that they will think that we are saying that this is God's will.

Now, the Bible doesn't explicitly say that everything happens for a reason, but it does emphasize our responsibility in finding meaning and purpose in our lives. Proverbs 19:21 says many plans are in a person's mind, but the Lord's purpose will succeed. Now, this is a proverb that is reminding us that we should align our purposes with God's finding meaning and serving and loving others.

God gave us the responsibility to be stewards of creation. Think from the very beginning the story of Genesis in the Garden. God created everything, and then God created humans and said, Here you go, you are now stewards or caretakers of all of creation. And then God gave us the freedom to choose good or evil. Think about Adam and Eve's choices.

So when we think about these questions, sometimes that we ask, like, was it the victim's time? If I text someone while driving and I get in a car accident and kill them, is it God's will if I cheat on my husband or commit some sort of crime when we say, well, that was God's plan, there's a problem, because when we use the statement, we take away our personal responsibility and make God responsible for our mistakes and sins.

If we think that everything that happens is part of God's plan, then why does it matter if I vote? Why would it matter if I care for my body? Why would it matter if I stand up for injustices in the world? So it

becomes this question of God's sovereignty or God's authority or God's power in this world, and there are different ways to view it.

You might be wondering how the United Methodist Church views it. And here is a really brief overview, a brief summary overview of some differences on how you can view God's sovereignty. There's more in Adam Hamilton's book, *Half Truths*, and there's lots of information about out there about this. But one view is called Deism. Now, Deism is a belief in a distant, non intervening creator.

God does believe that God created everything and now just sits back and does nothing. This, this, this type, this type of view. Sometimes, you can picture a clockmaker or a watchmaker, and the creator knows all of the pieces and the parts and how they work together. And they, and they craft it exactly how it, how it works. So it's ticking or whatever.

And then they set it into motion, and then they step back. So this kind of a view of God would reject any sort of miracles or supernatural intervention in in life. Another viewpoint is Calvinism. This was named after John Calvin, and this is kind of what the Presbyterians showed off from this kind of view. And Calvinists believed that they emphasized God's sovereignty in both creation and in salvation.

And so not only did God create, but God has predestined who will be saved and who will be damned. So Calvinists stressed that that human nature is thoroughly corrupt thoroughly sinful, and the divine grace is the sole source of salvation. They also believe this concept of irresistible grace. In other words, if God wants you to be safe, saved, there's nothing that you can do about it.

They also teach limited atonement, which means Jesus's sacrifice is only for the elect. Now are many of them. This was named after Jacob Arminius, and this is kind of where the Methodists shoot from. And Armenians believe they emphasize human freewill in salvation, that human free will is part of salvation. They reject the idea of unconditional predestination, and they support conditional election based on God's foreknowledge of human choices.

God creates, God knows, are our choices, but we are given that choice. But Armenians also believe in universal atonement, where Jesus's sacrifice on the cross is available to everyone, but only effective for those who believe, only those who take that step. And they stress the need for God's grace, right? It is God's grace by that by which we are saved.

We all have this available to us, but we have a step in order to accept that grace and Armenians also believe that you can lose your salvation if you step away from faith. Now, I say this because this is kind of a spectrum. There is there is one side where the God is the creator, but is very distant, doesn't intervene.

And what's happening has created, but just kind of sitting back and watching what's happening from afar. And then on this very other end of the spectrum is God as micromanager, micromanaging every single thing. And in this is far side. They believe that in order for God to be sovereign, in order for God to have all power in control, that God must control everything.

Now, there is this spectrum of from this far into this far end. And we probably, you know, go somewhere along the middle. But these are different ways how we view God's involvement in the world, how we view human free will, and how the mechanics of salvation work. Now, maybe if you decide that, well,

maybe everything doesn't happen for a reason, maybe it isn't God's will that tragedies happen or crimes happen or abuse happens.

So if that's the case, if I say, okay, well, maybe God is not in control of everything, well then how can God still be all-powerful? Now, the answer is, for one, we're not supposed to understand it all in times of suffering and in times of hardship, we may question why would God allow such pain? Job is a story in the Old Testament, and it's a great story.

And it is about a righteous man who has done all the things right, but yet is still suffering these unimaginable things in his life. And so immediately his friends start trying to offer explanations. Oh, well, maybe you must have sinned along the way. In order for this to happen. Something must have happened in order for you to cause this.

This to justify the pain. And so his friends try to try to tell him, okay, it's maybe this reason or that reason, and then God responds and therefore chapters in Job of God's response. Chapter 38 to 41 and God says things like, Well, were you there when I laid the foundation? Like, were you there? Were you there?

Did you give strength to the horse? Like, did you do all these things? Do you know where the storehouses are for the snow? And on and on. Job But God responds to Job and his friends and so much so that Job says, Okay, Wow. Whoa. I get it. Like, I don't have all of these things.

Figure out, figure it out. Like, I have no idea what's happening. And God reminds us that God's ways are way beyond our comprehension and that we may never fully understand the reasons things happen. First Corinthians says this: We now see a reflection in a mirror. Then we will see face to face. Now, I know partially, but then I will know completely in the same way that I have been completely known.

Paul is saying these words. He's saying, right. We I don't know everything I can see dimly, but eventually I'll see everything just like God knows everything about me already. Adam Hamilton puts it this way: God's knowledge of something is different from God's command that this or that event will happen. So God is like a parent inviting us. His children to choose the right path, knowing that sometimes we will choose the wrong path.

Now, I certainly didn't want Lex to live in Chicago. If his plane was delayed. I invited him to consider another option. And that's exactly what God does think about this from the very beginning with Adam and Eve and giving them the choice of freedom. So, did God create everything? Yes. Is God the owner and ruler over everything?

Yes. Did God set the earth and the laws and put it all in motion? Yes. But we still start to question. But. But why? And we can question this like, well, why am I preaching this sermon today? Well, that's because I preached last weekend on the on the first week of the sermon series. And I preached on this sermon series because we thought it would be a good all church study to do and learn and grow from.

And I'm here at Horizons because the bishop sent me and I became a pastor because I felt this calling from God. And I said, Yes, God, here I am, send me. And I'm I felt that calling because I grew up in the church with youth leaders and youth pastors and pastors and teachers and all of these people surrounding me.

And I grew up in the church because my parents brought me there and baptized me in the church. And then their parents brought them and brought them to the church. Right. We could go on and on and on about why I am preaching this sermon today. There's this cause is contingent on another good thing and contingent on another thing and another thing.

And we could go on forever. And then Thomas Aquinas says that when we get to the end, that is when people use the word God. All right, God started it. God, God started it and put it in motion. God's power doesn't come from the power that God holds, but from the power that God is willing to share with us.

God is the Creator. God put things in motion and gave us the power. Second, Timothy seven says that the spirit God gave us does not make us timid but gives us power and love, and self-discipline. Sometimes things happen for a reason, and I do believe that God intervenes at times in some things. Sometimes good things happen for reasons when we allow ourselves to be open to the movement of God in things, and sometimes bad things happen because we make bad choices or others make bad choices, and we have to deal with the consequences.

But regardless of that, all God promises that God will never leave us, that God will never forsake us, that God will walk with us on the journey through the pain, through the suffering, and then even God will give us giving us that opportunity to bring something good from it. And that's the hope that we have in Christ. When we put our faith in Christ.

Now, the belief that everything happens for a reason can provide us comfort, but it can also limit our understanding of the world and our ability to empathize with others. Think about what would happen if I said everything happens for a reason. This was God's plan. And I'm saying this about maybe my own family, that God has blessed me with two amazing children.

And then you have this couple that's sitting next to me that are struggling with infertility, me saying that everything happens for a reason may not bring them comfort in that moment. And I think that we have to be careful of that. We embrace the idea that life is unpredictable, that life is unfair at times. And when we do that, we can allow us to find meaning and purpose in our own lives in the midst of uncertainty.

And then our response as stewards or caretakers of God's creation, we offer support for others. We offer care and compassion for others, not because everything happens for a reason, but because we choose to be compassionate. We choose to be caring human beings instead of everything happening for a reason. How about everything happens? Everything that happens reveals an opportunity for us instead of seeking out reasons, we can be called to create our own meaning through our own actions, through our own relationships, through our own service and worship and praise to God and service to others so we can caring and compassionate beings, not because everything happens for a reason, but because we choose to follow

God's purpose in a world that is filled with uncertainty. Because, in the end, God wins. In the end, God's kingdom will be here on Earth completely. God's plan will come to completion. But in the meantime, we are called to care for one another. Would you pray with me? Holy God, help us to live in this balance. This idea that you are all knowing all powerful, that you hold the keys to hell and and life, that you, you know us, that you know our actions, that you know our hurts and that you know our pain and help us balance that.

That knowledge that you are sovereign with the understanding that life is messy, that life is unfair, that life is unpredictable, that we don't understand why everything happens and help us to think about others who may be going through pain or suffering or hurt and allow us to use the right words to show them that we care about them, to show them that you care about them, and that we don't have all the answers, that we can't say that this is the reason why it's happened, but rather we have been called to care for one another and that is what we are going to do.

God, we know that you are in control, but we also know that you have given us this choice in life to either be caretakers or to turn our backs, help us to be the people that you have created us to be God. We say all of this in Jesus' name, Amen.