

Everything Happens for a Reason?

By Pastor Mandy Barkhaus

Well, one of my favorite movies and books is the book and movie called *Catch Me If You Can*, and it's based on a true story ish about a teenage con artist. And from the 1960s, he cashed millions of dollars in forged checks and pretended to be a pilot and a doctor and a lawyer. And the whole story is kind of the police trying to catch him and all of getting through all of his cons.

But at the very beginning of the movie, there's a scene with his father. So Frank Abagnale, senior and Frank Senior is getting some sort of award, and he's standing in front of a bunch of people and in the audience is his son, his teenage son, who obviously looks up to his dad a lot. And so his dad is up in front in and receiving this award or something.

And he says this The character that Frank that plays the character of Frank Abagnale is Christopher Walken. So you can imagine what the scene might look like. So Frank Senior gets up there, and he says to Little mice fell into a bucket of cream. The first mouse quickly gave up and drowned. The second mouse wouldn't quit. He struggled so hard that eventually, he churned that cream into butter and crawled out.

Gentleman eyes of this moment, I am that second mouse, and the crowd clapped. Yay! And so the movie goes on where Frank starts this. He's starting to con people, and he gets this job as a doctor in a hospital, and he starts dating one of the nurses. And so Frank Junior is dating this nurse, and she invites him over to her parents house to meet the parents.

And so they're sitting down to this wonderful meal, and the father is taking them out. Well, they're Lutheran and Frank Jr con artist says, Oh, I'm a Lutheran, too. And the dad of the girlfriend says, Great, Will you pray for us before our meal? And you can tell Frank Jr he's played by Leonardo DiCaprio. You can tell he's like a little nervous about this, but he's like, okay, I'll pray.

And so he bows his head and he folds his hands and he pauses. And then he says, two little mice fell into a bucket of cream. The first mouse quickly gave up and drowned. But the second mouse, he struggled so hard that he eventually churned that cream into butter and walked out, amen. And the mom of the girlfriend, she was like, That was beautiful.

That little mouse churned that cream into butter. So if we like the first mouse in the bucket of cream, if we give up like that, then God will never help us. At least, that's what it seems like when we say God helps those who help themselves. And if we take God out of this saying out of this equation, you'll hear people say people need to pull themselves up by their bootstraps.

But then if we put the Bible into it, if we find some Scripture that things that we say, sometimes we say a man reaps what he sows. Now, this is straight from the Bible, Galatians chapter six and more. Well, we'll hear more of that chapter later on. But is this saying God helps those who help themselves? Is this true?

And we're in this series of half-truths. And Adam Hamilton, the author of the book, says that it's probably not a half-truth. This one maybe is at best one third true. Now, I don't know where this saying comes from, but I was really surprised that a Barna poll listed that this is one of the top verses that people said was found in the Bible.

People even said that this was one of the Ten Commandments. Of course, the problem is it's not one of the Ten Commandments, and it's not found in the Bible. So, is it true at all? Well, yes. I mean, we do need to work at times. We sometimes have to work for our food. If we sit down to empty table and we bow our heads and we thank God for this wonderful meal and we open our eyes and suddenly the food got out of the refrigerator and it made itself and it just ended up on our table.

It doesn't work that way. Sometimes we need to work at getting a job. I mean, we need to fill out applications and we need to, you know, create a resume and we need to present ourselves and enter interviews in order to get a job. But of course, God does work through people and our prayers. And so we do need to pray sometimes when things aren't working out, we pray, but we also do because prayer empowers us, guides our actions.

Now this saying God helps those who help themselves is wrong if we are using it simply to avoid helping others, saying, Well, that's not my responsibility. They need to help themselves, so let's think for a moment about the ancient world of Israel. Now, in this times when Scripture was written, it was a patriarch circle world, meaning that orphans and widows would have no legal status, they would have no social status.

So saying God helps those who help themselves to a woman or to a child who didn't have any male relative live to care for them would be out of line. There would almost be impossible for that woman or child to help themselves. But again and again in the is in Israel's laws, in the Psalms, in the Scripture, God makes it pretty clear that God passionately cares about us helping those who cannot help themselves, mainly the widows and the orphans and the foreigners.

And there's so many examples found in Scripture. Here's just a few of them. Psalm 68:5 says, Father of orphans, champion of widows is God in his holy place. God is the father of orphans. God is the champion of widows. Deuteronomy 24 is the passage where we find that when we, that when you harvest, you are supposed to leave some behind.

You leave them behind for immigrants, orphans and widows. That's what the Scripture tells us to do. In other words, we do all the work we harvest, and the people behind us get to reap what we've sown. They get to do the work, and they reap the benefits. In Exodus 22, starting at verse 21, it says this The Lord says, The Lord says, Don't mistreat, mistreat or oppress an immigrant because you were once immigrants in the land of Egypt.

Don't treat any widow or orphan badly. If you do treat them badly and they cry out to me, you can be sure that I will hear their cry. I'll be furious, and I'll kill you with the sword. Then your wives will be widows, and your children will be orphans. If you lend money to my people who are poor among you, don't be a creditor and charge them interest.

So, not only does God care about those who can't help themselves, but God commands us to do something about it. See, God actually does help those who cannot help themselves, and sometimes the people don't even deserve it. And that's what we call God's grace. So are you more likely to offer help without question, or are you more likely to say, well, they need to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, maybe even saying, Well, I worked hard for my money, I worked hard for what I have, and they can work hard, too.

Now, this quote from Martin Luther King Jr says, It's all right to tell a man to lift himself by his bootstraps. But it is cruel just to say to a boot list man that he ought to lift himself by his bootstraps. This is so true. But then the question becomes, who gets to decide who has boots and who doesn't have boots?

Now, we obviously don't live in the same society as the ancient Israelites. Our society today here is different than it used to be, and God is God was very clear about us helping those who could not help themselves immigrants, immigrants and orphans and widows. And I'm sure those same things would apply today. But who else is helpless today?

What challenge have people faced that might make it impossible or difficult for them to help themselves? You know, we think about what opportunities that may have been given to us to help ourselves that maybe have been denied to other people. What groups of people have been oppressed? What groups of people have don't seem to have a voice in our society really, today?

And what if what if what we're really saying when we say God helps those help themselves is we're saying that that we want to decide what's fair and what's not. And this reminds me of the parable of the land owner and the widow and the workers, Matthew 20 verses one through sixteen contains this wonderful whole parable of the workers in the in the Vineyard.

And Jesus uses this to illustrate the kingdom of heaven. And in this parable, a landowner hires workers to work in the field, and he agrees to pay the workers a denarius or a fair wage, a fair daily wage, regardless of the hours worked. So some workers were hired super early in the morning, and they worked all day long, and some workers were hired in the mid-day, and some workers were hired toward the very end of the day.

And when it's time to pay the workers, they all lined up from those who worked the shortest amount of time to all the way to the ones who had been there working all day long. And the landowner starts handing out a denarius. And so the people at the end of the line, the ones who had been there all day long, are seeing the workers who were there for just a short amount of time get one denarius.

And so they assume that when it gets to them, they're going to get more than a denarius. And, of course, they didn't. They got one denarius and they're upset. They're upset that they got the same thing that those in front of them received also. And so the landowner goes on to explain that he has fulfilled his agreement to pay one denarius for the work.

And then he explains that he has the right to be generous to those who were hired last. And this parable teaches about the generosity and the fairness of God's grace, emphasizing that all who come to God will receive the same equal salvation, regardless of their past deeds, regardless when they came to believe in God. And when we help others, we should do so with the same level of grace.

It's not always easy, but we should. So what else does Jesus say about helping others? When the disciples wanted to send away the 5000 because they were hungry, Jesus didn't say, Great idea, go send them away so they can help themselves. Instead, Jesus said to them, There's no need to send them away. You give them something to eat, you do it.

You do the work, you help others. So let's return to the Scripture here, where we read that a person will reap what they sow or harvest what they plant. It comes from Galatians Chapter 6 and it says, Make no

mistake, God is not mocked. A person will harvest what they plant. Those who plant only for their own benefit will harvest devastation from their selfishness.

But those who plant for the benefit of the spirit will harvest eternal life from the spirit. Let's not get tired of doing good because, in time, we'll have a harvest if we don't give up. So then, let's work for the good of all whenever we have an opportunity, and especially for those in the household of faith. So the Scripture is telling us to be careful to not just work for the good, for our benefits, but for the benefit of others.

And really for God's benefit. The Scripture tell us is tells us to not grow tired from doing good and not to give up. Just like that little mouse who churned that cream into butter. But we all do the work for the benefit of all when we have the opportunity. So we care. When we have the opportunity for people's needs, their basic needs like food and shelter and clothing and security, their basic human rights.

But we also care when we have the opportunity for the needs of others, because there's other needs that people have, like the need for hope and love and forgiveness and a sense of purpose in life and faith. So sometimes if a person's basic needs are not met, they will have no capacity for hearing about the hope in love and forgiveness or the good news of Jesus.

And so this means that sometimes we just simply need to help with the immediate basic needs of people. But it's also important for us to help others by building relationship chips with others of those who cannot help themselves. And when we find out what more they need, we can help and guide them so that they can help themselves.

And by doing that, we're sharing the love of Jesus with them along the way too. And as connections with people increase, so too our compassion for others will increase. God will indeed help those who help themselves. But sometimes people need a little light. Now, there are times when you may need help. And we're going to talk more about this next week when we talk about the phrase God won't give you more than you can handle.

But I think sometimes it's really hard for people to for help. And I think that's largely because this idea that everybody should just help themselves is so popular. And what if we got rid of that, that phrase? What if we got rid of that thinking that everybody just needs to help themselves? Then would people more likely ask for help so we know what they need so we could create relationships, so we could share the love of Jesus.

Now, I know that many of you already help others, and I'd love to hear more about what you do to help others. Maybe you serve each week at the mission, or maybe you volunteer every week at a school. Maybe you look after an elderly neighbor, and you just check in on them every once in a while. Maybe you generously give in other ways.

And to you, I say you have beautiful feet. And that comes from Isaiah. And this comes from a passage in Isaiah. In Isaiah, where it's a time where the Israelites were in an extended period of despair. They've witnessed Jerusalem's destruction. They're waiting for some sort of redemption to arrive. And the Prophet Isaiah emphasized in visions, the messengers not slowly walking over the hills, but racing across the hills of Judah, Judea, signaling the arrival of peace and salvation, God's liberation of his people from captivity was underway, and there was excitement about that.

So Isaiah 57:7 says, how beautiful on the mountains are, the feet of the messenger, bringing good news, breaking the news that all's well, proclaiming good times, announcing salvation, telling Zion your God rains. And now and now, we have the message of Jesus, the message of hope for all who hear the good news and those who believe in the good news.

So imagine telling someone that God only helps those who help themselves. What if they don't even have the right tools? What if they don't have any sort of hope whatsoever? Or what if Scripture tells us? What if they don't have the opportunity to help themselves? So if and when you have the opportunity to give or to help or to offer assistance or a chance to share the good news of Jesus, then do so with the same kind of grace that God has working to benefit all.

When you have the opportunity and through helping, we will not only do what God commands us to do to care for the basic needs of others, but we will share the hope and love and saving grace of God. Would you join me in prayer? Lord God, we desire to have beautiful feet that bring your good shoes to the earth.

So, give us fearless steps that venture through the shadows of adversity. Give us empathetic steps that lead us to those in pain. Give us joyful steps that bring comfort to hopeless friends. Give us blessed steps unwavering in your love. Give us active steps that proclaim came the message of your grace and, above all, guide us to walk in your path. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.