

Does Everything Really Happen for a Reason? (John 11:1-9)

Asking for a Friend Summer Sermon Series

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WATCH/LISTEN: www.fbcjc.org/sermon/does-everything-really-happen-for-a-reason/

Do you know what these four people have in common: Marilyn Monroe, Oprah Winfrey, Drew Barrymore, and even former heavyweight boxing champion Mike Tyson?



All four of them – along with many others – believe that everything happens for a reason. I discovered their quotes while I was doing some online research for this sermon. But of course I continued to do my research and I came across a couple of other quotes related to our topic today: “Does everything really happen for a reason?”

I typed those exact words into my google search window and this is one of the first answers that I came across:

- "Does everything happen for a reason? The short answer is “yes”; because God is sovereign, there are no random, out-of-control happenings. God’s purposes may be hidden from us, but we can be assured that every event has a reason behind it."

Source: <https://www.gotquestions.org/everything-happens-for-reason.html>

But I looked at a few more links, and you might be shocked to know that I found a nearly complete opposite answer to this important question.

- " God is sovereign and in control of all things. What God orchestrates and allows is meaningful, significant, and purposeful. Though everything may not happen for a reason, what we find in the Bible is that God will redeem us, restore us, help us, and cause a good outcome for those of us who love him and follow Him."

Source: <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/christian-life/does-everything-really-happen-for-a-reason.html>

Of course, we’re going to turn to the Bible in just a moment to really dig into this topic, but before we go any further, I want to acknowledge that you may already have a very clear answer to this question. Your interpretation of scripture and your life experiences may have led you to believe strongly that YES, everything does happen for a reason! And at the same time, there are others who believe just as strongly and with just as much conviction that NO, not everything happens for a reason!

And that's completely OK. There is room in the Christian faith and within this congregation for those two different views to coexist. Our salvation doesn't hinge on what we think about this single topic. But, it's important to wrestle with, because what we think about this topic is directly connected with what we think about God and how God is at work in this world and in our own lives.

It seems like this question – Does everything happen for a reason? – almost always comes up in our lives when tragedy strikes or disappointment surprises us. In a practical sense, it's not usually so much a theological topic for us, as it is an area where we're trying to find comfort or reassurance to move past the tragedy and find some sort of "silver lining," or perhaps just "an answer" to something that doesn't make sense to us on the surface.

I've never heard of anyone winning the lottery and boldly proclaiming, "Well, you know that everything happens for a reason." Instead, I hear these words when there is a natural disaster, or someone dies, in some other way the rug is pulled out from under someone in a major way. We ask this question when life falls apart and we're searching for answers. A few years ago my wife and I were owners of a failing business venture, and we nearly lost everything financially. It was almost second nature for us to try and figure out WHY that happened to us. There had to be a reason for that failure, right? – especially when we felt strongly that God had led us to start that business in the first place.

When life gets hard or something disappointing happens, we naturally begin asking "Why?"

That's exactly what Jesus's closest followers did in the passage that was read earlier. In John 9, Jesus and his disciples encountered something in life that wasn't really fair: a man was blind, and he hadn't been able to see for his entire life. They immediately asked the same question that we want answers to: "Why? Why did this happen? There must have been a reason. What was the reason?"

And they immediately linked someone's sin with the fact that someone was suffering...

- 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

In their minds, this man's blindness – the fact that his life wasn't all that it "should be" – was the direct result of someone's sinfulness. Someone had to be at fault; either the man himself for somehow being a sinner before he was even born, or this man's parents. If "everything happens for a reason," the blind man or his parents was the reason. But Jesus redirects his followers and lets them know they're off base in their assumptions.

- 3 Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him."

I find it really interesting that Jesus didn't dwell on WHO caused this man's blindness. He did clarify that it wasn't the fault of the man or his parents. But Jesus didn't tell us whose fault it was. That wasn't what Jesus wanted the focus of this conversation to be about – and it's a great lesson for us today. It is SO EASY for us to get caught up in finding someone to blame, that that's all we seem to care about.

Why is this person blind, or divorced, or bankrupt? – or whatever it might be. In our desire to know WHY, we too often jump to BLAMING someone. That's a sad, misguided way of living our lives. And it leads us to become stuck in the past, trying to figure out the "Why?" instead of moving forward with our lives.

Instead of focusing on that, Jesus focused on what could happen in the life of this blind man... and not on the man himself, but on what GOD could do.... "SO THAT GOD'S WORKS MIGHT BE REVEALED..."

Nowhere in the Bible are the words "everything happens for a reason." The closest phrasing to those words is found in Paul's letter to the Romans, in chapter 8. Like everything else in the Bible, it's very important to understand the context, the bigger picture, of what Paul was writing about when we scratched these words out in a letter to the Christian church in Rome.

We'll start with Romans 8:18 & 19...

- 18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God...

Paul is acknowledging what we all know: Life involves suffering. Life is hard. It doesn't matter if you're a man who has been blind since birth who lives in Jerusalem, or if you're a parent struggling to raise your kids and make ends meet in Jefferson City. But while we struggle in this life - if our lives are connected with Jesus as his children - then we find hope in knowing that God is at work.

And a little bit further on in this section of the Paul's letter, we come across this nugget of how God's Spirit doesn't just leave us to struggle on our own...

- 26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with groanings too deep for words. 27 And God, who searches hearts, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

It's especially in those times when we find ourselves asking "Why? WHY DID THIS HAPPEN?" When life falls apart and we sometimes say those words that are meant to help us find a silver lining: "Remember, everything happens for a reason." It's in those moments of tragedy and uncertainty when God's Spirit is so close to us that the Spirit prays for us when we have no idea what we should even pray for. And because God - through the Spirit - continues to be close, and active, and alive in our lives... then we can find assurance in what Paul wrote next:

- 28 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.
>The NIV translation says it this way: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

For me, I struggle with accepting the statement that "everything happens for a reason." Personally, I believe that sometimes bad things happen because we live in a fallen, broken, sinful world. Sometimes there is simply no point or purpose to the tragedy. But sometimes there is.

In conclusion, I want to tell you about Jayne and her son, Nate. I met Jayne about a year ago, and she gave me permission to share her story with you. When I think about what it looks like for “all things to work together for those who love God,” it looks a lot like Jayne’s story to me.



Jayne’s son, Nate, graduated from college just over two years ago. He had struggled with mental health issues for a while, and, tragically, he died of suicide not long after his graduation. Of course, Jayne – his mom – was devastated and continues to be heartbroken at the loss of her son. She wrote these words as she processed her immense grief:

“My pain is immeasurable. My loss is irreplaceable. Our family is destroyed.”

If I were in Jayne’s shoes, I think I would have become consumed with exactly what Jesus’s disciples were consumed with in the passage we looked at together earlier in John 9. “Whose fault it this?! Who sinned and caused this?! I know that Jayne has had some of those feelings, and

rightfully so.

But as I’ve spoken with Jayne about Nate, and life, and her terrible loss, and how does a person move forward after something like that happens, I’m amazed at how she’s looking for how God can work through this terrible situation so that Nate’s passing is not in vain. Jayne has committed herself to help educate teens and adults about mental health struggles. She’s passionate about helping connect young people with the resources they need so that they find help and the support they need. Even though Jayne and everyone that knew Nate would trade everything for Nate to still be alive, Jayne has made the decision to work through his loss by using Nate’s story to inform and educate others – teens and adults alike – about the seriousness of mental health, and how important it is for resources and assistance to be available to those who are struggling.

I have no way of knowing how many lives that God has already touched and impacted through Jayne and Nate’s story in recent months. But I know it’s significant. Instead of being stuck in the past... Stuck with trying to find the answer to the question “Why did this happen,” Jayne has turned her attention and her energy to allowing God to work through her because “God works for the good of those who love him...” And not only has Jayne’s life been changed, but the lives of person after person who have heard and been impacted by Nate’s story.

Romans 8:28 - “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

So when life surprises us with disappointment, and we ask “Why?” or try to find the “reason” something unexpected happened, let’s not give into the temptation to blindly blame and find fault in someone else. Instead, let us look to God and remember that “for those who love him” – that’s you, and that’s me – God works for our good.