

“Half Truths” by Pastor Adam Hamilton

Session 1: Everything Happens for a Reason

September 29, 2024

4:00 PM

Opening Activity – “Stories in the News”

Take a few moments with your partner(s) to read through your news article. Be ready to summarize the event, and what happened as a result.

Session 1: Everything Happens for a Reason

- How, if at all, do I believe the events in my news account fit into God’s plan?

Adam Hamilton contends that “half truths” can sometimes hurt people, can lead people to conclusions about God that are untrue, can push others away from God, can cause people to avoid critical thinking on complex issues, can be used to justify our personal biases or prejudices, or, when spoken to others, can bring pain.

Over the next few weeks, we will look at five “half truths” that are often spoken and repeated, and see what Scripture says about them. Today, we look at, “Everything happens for a reason.”

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, we yearn for deeper insights into your loving intent for humankind. We struggle to reconcile the difficult and painful parts of living with a God who loves us and desires an abundant life for us. Guide us as we seek to better understand your truth. Amen.

Session 1 Video – “Everything happens for a Reason.”

- What are some situations you can name where you or someone else, responded by asserting that everything happens for a reason?
- Hamilton points out similar aphorisms: “It’s all part of God’s plan” or “It was God’s will.” How do you respond to the understanding that painful, tragic, or evil occurrences are a part of God’s plan for the world?
- What does Hamilton say about how sovereigns operate in ruling their people? How does this help us understand the sovereignty of God?
- Hamilton suggests that we need to be attentive to the whisper of God’s voice in making us aware of what needs to be done. Can you name a time when you responded to a nudge from God.

Scripture Focus – Deuteronomy 30:19-20a

The setting: Through Moses, God has led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, where they have wandered for 40 years. As they prepare to enter the Promised Land, Moses, an old man facing death, reiterates the law for the people and reminds them of God’s expectations.

- What are the choices Moses lays before the people?
- What do these choices imply to you about the statement, “Everything happens for a reason”?

Three Critiques of the Idea, “Everything happens for a Reason.”

(1) The Problem of Personal Responsibility...

“Everything happens for a reason” eliminates the concept of personal responsibility for our actions. If everything happens according to God’s immutable plan, then whatever I do must have been God’s will. God isn’t going to change it. In fact, God must have wanted me to do it; otherwise God would not have let it happen.

(2) The Problem of God’s Responsibility...

This makes God responsible for everyone’s actions. If God actually intended for everything to happen then God is responsible for every terrible thing that happens in our world. Tragedies do not happen in spite of God’s will, but because of it.

(3) The Problem of Fatalism and Indifference...

A fatalist thinks, “Whatever is going to happen, will happen. Whatever will be, will be. We are powerless to change it.” So what is the difference in the choices we make – medicine, working out, what we eat, etc. We should be indifferent.

- **What do you think about these three in terms of “Everything happens for a reason”?**
- **What about in terms of the news stories we read before?**

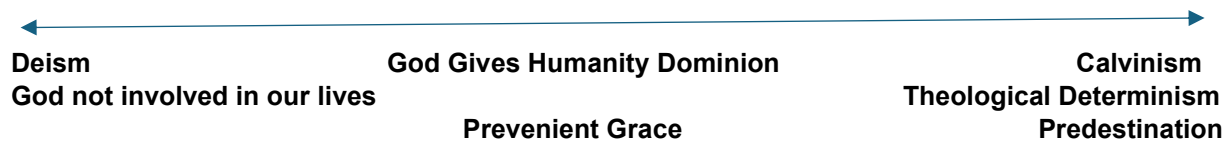
God's Sovereignty and Providence

God's providence – God's governance of the cosmos, including our world and everything in it. Christians believe that God superintends the universe and oversees what happens on the planet.

Divine sovereignty – this addresses the idea of authority or rule; a sovereign in the highest authority; a sovereign depends on no one else for the power to rule; Christians affirm that God's authority encompasses all creation and because God is the ultimate authority, all power and honor, glory and dominion ultimately belongs to God

While all Christians believe in God's providence and sovereignty, they often interpret these concepts in very different ways. Some view God as a micromanager, others as an absentee landlord. Others are somewhere in between.

God's Sovereignty and Providence Scale...



- **What are your thoughts on Calvinism? Theological Determinism? Predestination?**
- **Why do you think Calvinism is making a resurgence today? What is appealing about it?**
- **What are your thoughts on Deism, and the idea of God's "hands off" approach?**

- **Does the Facebook meme sent to Adam Hamilton from one of his church members help with your understanding of our phrase today...**

“Everything happens for a reason, but sometimes the reason is that you’re stupid and you make bad decisions.”

“The reason most things happen is not because God willed them, but because of the decisions we make or the laws that govern nature and our interactions with them. Yet God superintends. God wrote the laws of nature. God has a will and plan for humanity. God guides us by the Spirit through the Scriptures, in church, as we pray, and through other Christians. God strengthens and walks with us. We are called and empowered to be God’s hands and voice in the world, but God does not force us. God has shown us what is good and what is required of us, but he also gives us freedom to walk in his path or away from it, and that choice is what make us human.” – Hamilton, p. 42

“The Bible is largely the story of human beings doing what God doesn’t want them to do, of tragedies that sometimes happen in life, and of God working to comfort, heal, and redeem the human race following our missteps. God does not generally cause our suffering, but he carries us through it and brings something good from it...As a rule, I think we should be very, very careful about attributing to God the tragedies and pain that happen in our lives.” – Hamilton, p. 45

- **What do you think? Has this been your experience or not?**

Closing Thoughts...

As we have examined this half truth statement, “Everything happens for a reason,” in a time of suffering or sorrow, if you have the opportunity to offer different words, or to hear them, what would those words be?

Closing Prayer...

This afternoon, we are going to close with John Wesley’s Covenant Prayer, a prayer of surrender used by British Methodists in a covenant service on the first weekend of the New Year. Let us pray together...

*I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
thou art mine, and I am thine.
So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.*

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Session 2 – God Helps Those Who Help Themselves
Sunday, October 6 5:00 PM
