

# Stop Saying “Everything Happens for a Reason”

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July 19, 2017



Reading Time: 3 minutes

After a tragedy, sometimes a well-meaning person will comment, “Everything happens for a reason.”

Is that so? If the person making this statement is operating from a Biblical world view, are they suggesting that *God* is the direct cause behind all things that have happened?

If beneath this statement lies the implication that *God* is the reason something happened, then this statement is wrong. **In fact, one of the worst things you can say to someone grieving the loss of property, health, or a loved one is, “Everything happens for a reason.”** Sometimes things just happen because they happen - not because God has a specific design behind a particular unfortunate event. There does not need to be an immediate divine cause behind every event.

For example, God was not the cause, nor was He pleased, when Islamist Syed Farook and his wife murdered 16 social workers at the Inland Regional Center in San Bernardino, California on December 2, 2015. Of course, that terrible event in no way thwarted God’s

purpose (cf. Psa. 2:1-4), and perhaps there are mysterious ways God could have used that event for good (cf. Rom. 8:28). **But God did not orchestrate that tragedy.** God does not cause such wicked events.

But why did God not stop that mass shooting (or *any* mass shooting)? For the same reason God does not stop you from fudging the amount you owe on your taxes this year, texting on your phone while driving, or living a godless lifestyle; the same reason He does not stop you from cheating on your spouse or ignoring the needs of your neighbor. The freedom to make choices (often catastrophic choices) is an essential part of what it means to be human. Thomas B. Warren writes,

Once man has been created, it is not the case that God could either *permit* or *prevent* man's sinning without so changing man's nature that he would no longer be man.

*Thomas B. Warren, God and Evil, pg. 298*

There is a school of thought in Christendom today called **Calvinism**, which gets this topic wrong. Many Calvinists cannot fathom the idea that **God doesn't directly cause all things to happen**. On September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2001, six days after the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks, John Piper boldly said that God "could" and "would" be behind these actions.<sup>1</sup> According to Piper, and all other staunch Calvinists, **everything** happens for a reason, and **God** is that reason. Piper reiterates, "That is what the Bible teaches. God 'works all things after the counsel of His will' (Eph. 1:11)."<sup>2</sup> What a chilling thought - that *God* is behind all tragedy!

This is a disastrous abuse of the **context** of Apostle Paul's words in Ephesians 1:11. We should note that Paul *did not say*, "God directs all things, period" - but rather that God has entirely ("all things") fulfilled His plan to redeem mankind and establish His church through Jesus His Son. **The fact that Jesus redeemed us and established His church is the context of Ephesians 1 - not the divine orchestration of every individual event, wicked events included.**

When a parent or sibling is grieving the loss of a child, sometimes a well-meaning friend will say something to the effect of, "God needed another angel in heaven." This horrifying statement not only reflects deep Biblical ignorance (human beings do not go on to become angels, cf. Heb. 2:7), but it also leaves the terrifying impression that God is the direct cause of the child's death. Thank God He doesn't "need more angels."

There are Biblical explanations as to why there is suffering (including the loss of property, health, and innocent life) in this world. Sometimes things happen just because they happen. God has given mankind freedom of choice, and sometimes bad choices are accompanied by tragic consequences - at times involving innocent people. Bear in mind, however, that God has a plan for people that is bigger than this temporal world. **But the notion that God directly, individually ordains each and every instance of this world's pain and suffering is not Biblical.**

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## Footnotes

1. John Piper, "Why I Do Not Say, 'God Did Not Cause the Calamity, but He Can Use It for Good.'" DesiringGod.org.
2. Ibid.