

# TRITE, *not* TRUE

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rightnow MEDIA

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## SESSION 7: “*Everything Happens for a Reason*”

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### ► SERIES RECAP

*You and I are swimming in a culture full of opinions masquerading as wisdom. What’s worse, much of what passes as wisdom today has the ring of biblical truth. How do you tell the difference? How do you see through half-truths and self-help trends to access the deep wisdom of God’s Word and the full life found in Him alone?*

*Those are the questions Jarrett Stephens tackles in his series Trite, Not True – where he explores six of the most common pop philosophies that influence people’s lives today, including Christians.*

*As you dive in, you’ll discover how to decipher superficial insights from the real truth of God’s Word, as well as how to apply biblical wisdom to your everyday life. Because ultimately, the life of meaning and impact you long for doesn’t come from a philosophy, platitude, maxim, or mantra... but from one person, Jesus Christ.*

### ► OPEN

(Simple intro to frame the objective of the group study, break the ice, and get people thinking)

**Ask the group:** Have you ever been in a situation where you had to pretend you had an answer for a question – even though you didn’t? Share some examples.

We live in a culture that’s steeped in information overload. One big reason why is that we now carry access to nearly all the knowledge accumulated throughout human history – in our pockets.

When a question comes up, we’ve gotten used to doing a quick Google search and finding the answer within seconds.

But what if some questions in life don’t have answers? What do you do when Google can’t help? That’s the issue behind the phrase we’ll be looking at today:

*Everything happens for a reason.*

Does everything happen for a reason? Or do we just wish it did so we’d have answers to some of our deepest – and un-Google-able – questions? Let’s find out.

### ► WATCH THE VIDEO

**Jarrett Says:** As humans, we are hard-wired to believe in a “higher power.” We need what happens to us in life to line up or to make sense. We need it to be manageable for us.

Certainly, when something happens that is bigger than us or we can’t make sense of, it helps if we can chalk it up to something. There has to be a reason even if we don’t know what that reason may be. *Everything happens for a reason.*

### ► DISCUSS (ASK YOUR GROUP):

Before today’s discussion, have you ever questioned the phrase, “Everything happens for a reason?”

Would you be willing to share a time in your life when someone said it to you? Was it helpful or not helpful at that moment?

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**DIG DEEPER:** Lamentations 3:33 says, “*For He [God] does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone.*” When we say, “everything happens for a reason,” it can carry the subtle implication that God actively and callously causes harm when it suits Him so that His purposes can move forward. Have you ever felt that way? Have you worried that something bad happened or would happen because God was “mad at you?” How does Scripture address that kind of thinking?

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## ▶ WHAT THE WORLD SAYS

The idea of causality – that every process or state of being has been caused by a different process or state of being – is infused into almost every area of our culture, whether through philosophy, physics, or religion.

For example, when we see that recent flooding (effect) happened because it rained six inches in two hours (cause) or a 62-year-old got lung cancer (effect) because they smoked two packs a day for 40 years (cause), we assume everything else that happens in life must have a reason, too.

Religion doesn't help. Many religions further encourage the idea of causality by teaching that your circumstances today are the direct result of either your actions in a previous life (Hinduism), your previous actions in this life (Buddhism), or your actions that did or did not please God (Islam).

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**IDENTIFY THE TENSION:** Galatians 6:7–8 says, *“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”*

The Bible *does* teach the law of cause and effect – it's the law of the harvest. What you sow, you will reap: You can't sow lies and reap truth. You can't sow gossip and reap trust. So when people sow seed, whose actions cause the resulting harvest? God or the person who planted the seeds? Is God always the agent directly making things happen? Or does He allow us to reap the natural consequences of our actions?

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In other words, our culture is saturated with the idea that everything that happens (effect), happens for a reason (cause). And the law of cause and effect is a valid law when it comes to physics, philosophy, and psychology. But is it God's law?

Many Christians think so. As Pastor Jarrett mentioned, this is because of Romans 8:28.

*Ask a participant to read Romans 8:28*

There's a subtle difference between everything happening *for a reason* and God working *in all things that happen* – but it's a big difference. What do you think it is?

Let's take a look.

## ▶ WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

The idea that God is intimately involved with what happens on earth is called the doctrine of sovereignty, and it's clearly demonstrated all throughout Scripture. God is Lord – or sovereign, like a king – over all.

### God is sovereign

*Have participants read the following passages aloud to the group:*

- Colossians 1:16–17
- Job 42:2
- 1 Chronicles 29:11–12

The doctrine of sovereignty teaches that nothing happens to a child of God without it first filtering through His holy hands.

*What do you think about the idea that nothing happens in your life unless it has first filtered through God's loving hands? Is that comforting or not comforting? Why?*

If you follow Jesus, you can be assured that whatever you are going through hasn't caught God off guard. No matter what is happening, God will work it out for our good.

But does that mean God *caused* what's happening? Let's look at another doctrine – the doctrine of the Fall.

### We live in a fallen world.

*Have participants read the following passages aloud to the group:*

- Genesis 3:16–17
- Genesis 3:22–23
- Romans 5:12
- Romans 8:18–23

Our world is broken in every way – people, systems, nature, society.

And as we read in Romans 8, all of creation is groaning, waiting for God to right all the world's wrongs. Even non-Christians know something is out of whack.

Sometimes bad things happen because people make evil choices (e.g., abuse, terrorism, slander, injustice). Other times, bad things happen because the natural world is horrible affected by the fall (e.g., disease, natural disasters, debilitating effects of aging, death).

We live in a fallen world with fallen humanity, which means some things happen that aren't God's ultimate design or plan.

But can God still use those things for His glory? Can He turn them for our good? Does that mean He actively *caused* them?

### God doesn't work like we do.

Humans *like* having answers to nagging questions. We *like* feeling in control of life. And having a convenient answer to life questions you can't Google feels good.

But the truth is, we're not in control – God is. And He doesn't work the same way we do.

*Have participants read the following verses aloud to the group:*

- *Isaiah 55:8–9*
- *1 John 3:20*
- *Psalms 147:5*

These verses show us that God not only thinks and acts differently than we do, but He knows and understands more than we do.

*So, if God has a fuller understanding of our problems than we do, why do you think we assume He should fix problems the way we would?*

*If we know God is good, He loves us, and He has a greater understanding than we ever could of our circumstances... do we need to know what the purpose or the reason for our situation is?*

Or is it enough to know that God knows, and He is in control?

### ► APPLY THE BIBLICAL TRUTH IN YOUR LIFE

When someone you know and love is hurting, it's easy to focus on the question, "Why is this happening?" But once you understand that God knows what He's doing and He's got everything under control, you can let go of the need for complete understanding and rest in God's love and sovereignty.

Still, what do you do when friends are hurting? What do you say to someone when tragedy knocks on their door?

1. **Be silent.** Just because someone is hurting doesn't mean you have to have an answer. You might feel like you *have* to say something – but you don't.
2. **Be present.** Rather than rushing to speak, the wise thing to do might be to slow down and be present. Simply pray, come alongside, and just be there when they need you to be.

### ► CLOSE

The heart of saying, "Everything happens for a reason," is simply to have an answer when there just might not be an answer. The truth is that God knows – and He loves us, He walks with us, and He cares that we're hurting – and knowing *that* is enough. Resting in that knowing is the practice of trusting God.

So the next time you're tempted to tell someone, "Everything happens for a reason," stop. You don't have to. You don't need to say anything at all. You're not Google, and you're not God. You can just listen, pray, and practically meet their needs. Then trust them to the One who is Sovereign Lord over all creation.

**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, thank You that You love us. You are King of the universe, Lord over all creation. You are greater than we could ever imagine – and still you listen when we cry for You. Thank You for being a good Father to us. You have a greater understanding of what's going on in our lives than we ever could, so help us to trust You, Lord, even – especially – when we don't understand. Remind us of Your goodness and Your faithfulness in every season of life. We love You and are so grateful for You. In His name, Amen.*

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