

Angela Pound

Things the Bible Didn't Say

A Canadian Bible Engagement Study conducted in 2013 explored how Canadians interact with Scripture. The researchers discovered that three key factors influence how often people read the Bible: confidence, conversation, and community.

Before I tell you a result, let me ask you: What percentage of Canadian Christians do you think read the Bible at least once a week?

The answer is just 14%.

Weekly Bible reading in Canada has declined by half since 1996. Unlike in the past when older Christians were much more likely to read the Bible regularly, today there is very little difference between younger and older Bible readers.

A significant conclusion of the study was that Bible engagement grows through talking about Scripture which encourages us to read it, reflect on it, wrestle with it, and apply it to our lives. While personal reflection is valuable, researchers found that discussing the Bible with others is one of the most important factors in developing a deeper and more meaningful engagement with God's Word.

We have reached the final message in our Bible Myths series. Over the past several weeks, we've taken a closer look at familiar sayings that many people assume are found in the Bible—but aren't. And perhaps that Canadian Bible Engagement Study helps explain why these myths become so common. When we're not regularly reading Scripture, reflecting on it, and talking about it with one another, it's easy for popular sayings, cultural wisdom, and even well-meaning advice to begin sounding like biblical truth. Before long, we can quote a phrase with complete confidence, even though it's never found in God's Word.

Many of them come from good intentions. Some of the myths we've explored have become popular because the voice of our culture is louder than the voice of Scripture. Others have developed because a Bible verse has been taken out of context or misunderstood. Today's saying—"Everything happens for a reason"—is a little different.

It usually comes from a sincere heart. When someone is hurting, we desperately want to say something that will ease their pain. Sometimes people mean something that is biblically true—that God can bring good out of suffering, or that He is present with us in our darkest moments. That is true. But the phrase itself is not found in Scripture. More importantly, when spoken at the wrong time or in the wrong way, it can unintentionally

deepen someone's hurt instead of bringing comfort. So today, rather than asking whether everything happens for a reason, we're going to ask a better question: What does God actually promise us when suffering enters our lives? And I think we'll discover that His answer is far more comforting than any cliché could ever be.

When we say everything happens for a reason we might infer that God had a part in it. We are trying to express our belief that God is not absent from our lives, that He is working even in difficult circumstances, and that our suffering is not meaningless. In many ways, that desire comes from a deep theological truth: we believe in a God who is sovereign, who is present, and who is able to bring redemption out of even the most painful situations. But the danger comes when we move from believing that God can bring purpose out of our circumstances to assuming that God caused every circumstance to happen for a specific reason. This is where we need to be careful, that with a response of "Everything happens for a reason," we are not demonstrating to others that God has necessarily caused their circumstance to happen for a specific reason.

If you think to the story of Job. Job's friends represent the "everything happens for a reason" mentality. They desperately try to explain Job's suffering. They say, essentially, "There must be a reason this happened."

But God rebukes them. Job's friends saw Job's suffering and immediately tried to explain it. They searched for the reason behind his pain. But God did not praise their explanations. In fact, God challenged them because they spoke about Him without understanding.

Think about some of the most horrific moments in human history—the Holocaust, acts of terrorism, natural disasters that decimate communities. Or, on a more personal level, I remember having a conversation with an individual who had just lost their baby girl. We talked through their experience—a labour that seemed to be going well until suddenly, everything changed. A baby born blue, not breathing, and the joy and anticipation of welcoming a child into the world turned into fear and uncertainty. As they shared their story, I was brought back to the moments when our own baby girl was born. I remembered the emotions—the anticipation, the fear, the prayers whispered in those moments, the overwhelming hope that everything would be okay. Our baby, born blue, not breathing, had a similar beginning, but for us our story had a different ending. We got to hold our daughter, bring her home, and watch her grow. But for this family, that was not their story. Their daughter spent less than a month connected to machines as doctors fought to give her every chance. Eventually, they had to face the devastating news and there was nothing more that could be done. Their beautiful baby girl was gone.

And in moments like that, what do we say? How do we explain that kind of suffering? How do we tell a grieving parent that "everything happens for a reason"? What reason could possibly be enough? Sometimes our words, even when spoken with the best intentions, cannot carry the weight of someone's pain. One of the biggest problems with "Everything happens for a reason" is that it often tries to explain suffering instead of entering into suffering. Sometimes the greatest gift we can offer someone who is suffering is not an explanation, but a presence. The Bible does not always give us a reason for our pain, but it does give us the promise of God's presence in our pain. We worship a God who does not stand far away from our suffering, but a God who entered into it through Jesus Christ.

To stand before those events and simply say, "Everything happens for a reason," raises difficult questions. What reason could possibly explain the suffering of millions of people? What reason could justify the loss of innocent lives? And what would that say about the character of God?

The Bible does not ask us to call evil good, or to pretend that suffering is somehow less painful because we can explain it. When Job experienced unimaginable loss, his friends tried to explain his suffering, but their explanations only added to his pain. God never condemned Job for grieving, questioning, or crying out.

Instead, God met him in the midst of his suffering.

When someone loses a loved one, receives a devastating diagnosis, experiences abuse, walks through tragedy, or faces the brokenness of our world, saying "everything happens for a reason" can sometimes unintentionally communicate that God planned the hurtful event itself. But Scripture gives us a different picture: God is not the author of evil, but He is the Redeemer who enters into our suffering and brings hope in the midst of it.

Many Christians hear "God is sovereign" and assume that means "God directly caused everything that happens." Scripture gives us a more complex picture. God is sovereign over creation, but we live in a fallen world where sin, human choices, brokenness, and evil are real. God's sovereignty does not mean that every painful thing that happens is something God wanted to happen. It means that even when evil enters our story, evil does not have the final word. God remains powerful enough to redeem what was broken and bring hope where there seemed to be none. The promise of Scripture is not that everything that happens is good. The promise is that God is present in all things, and that nothing—not even suffering, tragedy, or death—can separate us from His love.

The cross reminds us that God does not always prevent suffering, but He enters into suffering and brings

redemption from it. On Friday, the disciples saw a tragedy. They saw their teacher betrayed, beaten, and crucified. They could not see what God was doing. But Sunday revealed that God was not absent on Friday. God was working even when they could not see it. Here these words from

Romans 8:18–30 “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. 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 sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that all things work together for

good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.”

The passage teaches that God’s ultimate purpose is to restore humanity to the glory we were created for by transforming believers into the likeness of Christ. Through Christ, what was lost in Adam is restored, and God’s people will share in Christ’s reign over a renewed creation. While we wait for this future glory, Christians are called to live with patient endurance, trusting in the Holy Spirit’s help and God’s unchanging plan of salvation. The story of Scripture is the story of creation, broken by sin, being restored and renewed by God. The suffering and “groaning” we experience now are not the end of the story. They are part of the waiting period before God’s promised renewal, when creation itself will be restored, God will dwell fully with His people, and all things will be made new. The hope of glory is the assurance that God is bringing His purposes to completion.

Romans 8:28–30 offers one of Scripture’s greatest promises: God is at work in all things for the good of those who love Him and are called according to

His purpose. This does not mean that everything that happens is good, or that every tragedy has an immediate understandable reason. Rather, it means that God is powerful enough to bring redemption, healing, and purpose even out of suffering. His goodness is often difficult to see in the middle of grief or pain, but His purposes will ultimately be revealed.

God's plan has always been to create a redeemed people who are shaped into the image of Christ, to form a Christ-shaped family, a people who reflect the character and glory of Jesus.

The Christian life is described as a journey from groaning to glory. Because we live in a broken world, suffering, grief, disappointment, and pain are part of our earthly experience. Christians are not promised exemption from suffering; instead, they follow Christ on the path of the cross, sharing in His suffering while looking forward to sharing in His glory.

Lament and grief are deeply biblical responses to suffering. Scripture is filled with examples of people crying out to God—some of the Psalms, Job, Jeremiah, and others. We need to create space for people to bring their pain honestly before God rather than pretending that faith means ignoring suffering. Grief is not a lack of faith; it is part of living in this world while trusting God's presence.

Yet, alongside groaning, Christians live with the hope of glory. Hope is not simple optimism or pretending everything will work out; it is the confidence that God's promises are trustworthy even when circumstances are painful. Christian hope allows believers to endure suffering because they know that God is not finished with the story.

Ultimately, the promise of Romans 8 is not that God prevents all suffering, but that suffering does not have the final word. God is transforming His people into the likeness of Christ, and one day creation itself will be renewed. The glory that awaits believers will far outweigh the struggles of this present life. The Christian journey moves from groaning to glory, sustained by the Father's love, Christ's presence, and the Spirit's help.

Romans 8:28 "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose," does not teach that every painful event happens because God had a specific reason for causing it. It teaches something deeper and more comforting: God is present in every circumstance, and He can bring good, redemption, and hope even from the things that were never good to begin with.

Maybe today you are living in the middle of the groaning. Maybe you are carrying a diagnosis you never expected, a grief you never imagined, a relationship that has broken, or a prayer that seems

unanswered. Romans 8 does not tell you to pretend it doesn't hurt. It does not tell you to rush past your grief. It reminds you that your groaning is not the end of the story. The same God who raised Jesus from the dead is the God who is with you in your suffering. The same Spirit who raised Christ is the Spirit who intercedes for you when you do not have the words to pray.

Paul continues in the same chapter, Romans 8:31–38
“What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers.”

So maybe instead of saying, "Everything happens for a reason," we can offer something better:

"I don't know why this happened. I don't know what

God is doing in this moment. But I know God is with you. I know God loves you. I know God has not abandoned you. And I know that one day, He will make all things new."

Because the hope of Scripture is not that every moment makes sense. The hope of Scripture is that God holds us even in the moments that don't and that God can work through all things for the good of those who love him and that God is present in all things, and that nothing—not even suffering, tragedy, or death—can separate us from His love.