

No, God doesn't have a plan. But that's OK.

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Last week was spring break, and I'd promised the kids that I'd take them to the local trampoline park. They love the place . . . though I wouldn't be surprised to learn that the National Association of Orthopedic Surgeons is a major shareholder.

Anyway, the morning that we were going to go, a Facebook friend posted a 50-percent-off coupon. I had actually opened my laptop to find the trampoline park website. Facebook was open, and the coupon caught my eye first.

I was tickled and felt a jolt of gratitude.

And God had nothing to do with it.

That may seem like an obvious statement to some, but there's a strain of theology out there that claims God is guiding the large and small details of our lives. That's what many people mean when they say that God is sovereign, that nothing happens outside of God's providence and plan.

[John Vest recently wrote](#) about this view of theology:

In my experience as a pastor, the most commonly held theological belief among both youth and adults is that *everything happens for a reason*. For most people, this means that God has a plan and that everything somehow fits in it. We long to believe that our lives and human history are not a series of random coincidences. We want to trust that God is in control and that deep within every situation—good or bad—some kind of meaning can be found.

He ultimately can't go there, and neither can I.

Some people find comfort in the idea that someday the curtain may be pulled back and we'll see how everything fits together, like some cosmic Rube Golberg device. I don't know. If God really is all-powerful, surely God can work God's purposes out in

ways that don't involve children getting cancer or thousands perishing in a tsunami.

If God has a plan, I don't think it's being petulant or faithless to hold God accountable if that plan doesn't correspond to who we know or believe God to be.

Instead, I don't attribute bad things that happen to God's will. But there's a problem there too: we end up giving God none of the blame and all of the credit. When something good happens, we thank God. When something terrible happens, we say God grieves with us and can make good come from it. That makes it sound like God has a plan for the good stuff, but washes God's hands of the bad stuff. This is unsatisfying too.

Instead, I believe life isn't a matter of plan—God's or ours—but of improvisation. The basic rule of improv is “yes-and,” to accept what's offered and build on it. Like [this recent StoryCorps piece on NPR](#). Jeff Wilson accidentally hit Tammie Baird with his car when they were both young adults. The experience had a major impact on them both, as you would imagine. He ended up becoming a surgical technician who does a lot of orthopedic work. She became a stunt woman, of all things, and has been “hit” by countless cars since that first collision 30 years ago.

Plan or yes-and?

The former may be comforting to some, but the latter more accurately reflects a world in which drivers just get distracted sometimes. And cells grow uncontrollably. And plates shift under the oceans, creating massive waves.

Plan has the virtue of rationality, but yes-and has the virtue of creativity. It also reflects our lives. We improvise all the time. We work within constraints. We are called upon to be flexible and creative. And if we are created in the image of God, I think improvisation is part of God's nature too. I certainly see it in scripture all over the place.

So if God doesn't have a plan, what does God have? A direction. An orientation. God seeks to move, and seeks to move us, in the direction of love and wholeness, no matter what the circumstance. All of this reminds me of Martin Luther King's arc in the moral universe, bending towards justice.

In fact, if God is love, maybe it's not accurate to say that God *has* a direction or an orientation or an arc. Maybe God *is* those things.

This idea of an improvising God makes people uncomfortable. Isn't God supposed to be all-powerful? What kind of God isn't capable of dramatic intervention? Answer: the Christian God. Folks, we just went through this last week. An improvising God, working within circumstance, isn't a heretical idea. In fact, in the crucifixion, God voluntarily puts on human weakness and shame. Herod and Pilate and the high priest and the rest of that corrupt system come after Jesus and seek to silence his message about the kingdom of God here on earth, not because they're doing God's bidding according to The Plan, but because *that's what powers and principalities do*.

And yet . . . Holy Week is full of yes-and.

Yes is "she has anointed me for my burial."

Yes is "put away your weapon, Peter."

Yes is standing there when Pilate asks, "What is truth?"

Yes is "Father, forgive them."

And the resurrection? I don't know what the resurrection is. Except that it's the ultimate And.

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