

## ***“Echoes of the Heart”***

*Reflections on Life and Community Living*

Contact Dr. Frantz on the web at [www.mlcchurch.com](http://www.mlcchurch.com)

**Does everything happen for a reason?** Earlier in the week, I was listening casually to an interview on National Public Radio with a former Miami Hurricane footballer, now an all-pro cornerback in the NFL.

A very articulate and successful young man, he was talking about his life growing up—his hard-working mother, sacrificing everything for her children; and his absentee father, who was never there when he most needed a father’s touch.

At one point, in reflecting back and trying to tie things together, he commented how he believed that *everything happens for a reason*.

Both in and outside of the church, I hear this comment all the time. And always, it leaves me shaking my head in bewilderment. I want to say, *Are you serious? Is that what you really mean to say?*

What I assume people mean by this is that everything that happens in their life is part of some divinely orchestrated plan. In other words, *it was supposed to be*. Or, more popularly, *it was meant to be* (I hear that all the time).

**Troubled theological waters.** I understand how there is a certain comfort in ascribing to some *Master Planner* (i.e., God) responsibility for everything that comes our way in life. However, if we push the logic on this, there are some prickly theological problems.

For example, was Michigan State *meant to lose* to the North Carolina Tarheels last night in the March Madness Final Four Championship Game (college basketball)? Was that result *meant to be*?

Or did North Carolina simply play a lot better at the right time and take the game from the Spartans early with superior execution and better strategy?

And how about the Shiite mosque that was blown up in Pakistan last week by Sunni terrorists, killing more than twenty-five innocent people? Was that *meant to be*? Did that *happen for a reason*?

And then there’s the earthquake in Italy with the mounting casualties.

Were all these outcomes somehow God’s doing? Did God *intend* for Michigan State to lose, for innocent Shiite Muslims to be blown up worshipping in their mosque and for x-number of Italians to tragically die due to a sudden shifting of plates below the earth’s surface?

Think about it! What kind of a God would do that? Certainly not the God I find revealed in our *sacred writings*—the God of love and justice, the God of infinite compassion and mercy.

Isn't it the case that much of what happens in our lives and in the wider world is simply because *stuff happens*. For a whole series of reasons, people make choices—every day, every moment—some good and some bad, and all the time there are consequences.

Terrorists, however we break it down, are evil people doing evil things. Earthquakes are natural disasters that simply happen as a consequence of the *natural* unfolding of the universe. They're not acts of a capricious God trying to tilt the balance of earthly justice one way or another.

**The key: how do we respond?** Again, stuff happens; creation happens. In freedom, people make choices; sometimes for good, other times for evil. Either way, again, there are consequences. And the key is how we deal with whatever comes our way.

How do we adjust to our losses and setbacks in life? How do we respond to the awful violence that at times comes too close, and to the tragic events that happen at no one's bidding; they just happen? Call it human error, call it sin; they happen.

Again, the key is how we respond. Sometimes the best we can do is focus on each day, doing our best to make good choices—choices that honor the sanctity of life, the memory of loved ones and that seek, in whatever ways, to make things better.

The problem with *everything happening for a reason* is that it can be an enormous copout. Where's the individual responsibility? More still—from God's point of view—when God gave us freedom at the dawning of creation, God relinquished control and chose to trust, instead, the goodness of our choices and the generosity of our spirit.

When we choose poorly and make a mess of things (which is much of the time), through a sorrow that at times fractures God's own heart, God forgives and—hopefully—we find the renewal and purpose to move on.