

To What Extent Are Our Lives Orchestrated?

Answers for Questions About the Restored Gospel from HisWorkmanship.net

Answer prepared by
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Question: To what extent does God orchestrate the many aspects of our lives?

Answer: Though briefly stated, this is a rather involved question. It will be helpful to begin by providing an illustration.

A number of years ago I met a small child who was wheelchair bound. The doctors had given her little chance of surviving into her teenage years let alone on into adulthood. Notwithstanding her grave prognosis, this young person lived, as I recall, past her 20th birthday, well beyond what had been predicted.

She was a delightfully pleasant person, one who enjoyed a bit of teasing and who had a warm smile for everyone she met.

My association with her taught me many valuable lessons. Perhaps the most important occurred on a particular occasion when I visited her home to administer the laying on of hands for her with another elder.¹

In preparation for the administration I did everything I knew to humble myself before the Lord in diligently searching out the His will in this matter, e.g. through the prayer of faith, fasting, and studying of scriptures. I truly believed this small child could be healed, and prepared myself accordingly.

Upon arriving in the family home for the administration, the father of the little girl began the conversation. The capstone of his message was that his daughter had taught him to love.

I and the other elder sat in silence at the unfolding revelation of how this father's love had grown and matured because of his caring for this young person. By the time he had finished speaking it seemed evident that his daughter was like a ministering angel in their family.

We had come to participate in a physical healing for this young girl. But something much greater and profound had occurred. We witnessed the revelation of a spiritual healing, one that appeared to be in process.

Though I cannot recall whether or not we actually administered the laying on of

¹ James 5:14

hands for her that evening, I do remember being ministered to by the profession of the father. We left their home in the wonder of the riches of God's grace and glory.

In the weeks and months following our visit to this young girl's home I continued to petition the Lord for a blessing for her and her family, asking if sufficient time had passed such that she could now be healed. In reply the Lord reminded me of instruction contained in several verses addressing the subject of healing and miracles:

Require not miracles, except I shall command you; except casting out devils; healing the sick; and against poisonous serpents; and against deadly poisons; and these things ye shall not do, except it be required of you by them who desire it, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled, for ye shall do according to that which is written. (D&C 23:6a)

And whosoever among you are sick, and have not faith to be healed, but believe, shall be nourished with all tenderness with herbs and mild food, and that not by the hand of an enemy. And the elders of the church, two or more, shall be called, and shall pray for, and lay their hands upon them in my name; and if they die, they shall die unto me, and if they live, they shall live unto me. Thou shalt live together in love, insomuch that thou shalt weep for the loss of them that die, and more especially for those that have not hope of a glorious resurrection. And it shall come to pass that those that die in me shall not taste of death, for it shall be sweet unto them; and they that die not in me, woe unto them, for their death is bitter. (D&C 42:12c-f)

Whatsoever ye ask the Father in my name it shall be given unto you, that is expedient for you; and if ye ask anything that is not expedient for you, it shall turn unto your condemnation. (D&C 85:16f)

Along with these verses the Lord reminded me of the many people who will say to Him at the day of judgment that they had prophesied in His name, cast out devils in His name, and done many wonderful works in His name as well. But in reply He will say to them that He never knew them (KJV) / that they never knew Him (IV).² Why would He so judge? I was given to understand that such people do not fulfill the Lord's will and purposes in doing all these wonderful things.³ Rather, they pursue their own wisdom and will, which is based on their own carnal (and very limited) understandings, perspectives, and pursuits; not His. Consequently, their actions – their prophesying, casting out devils, performing mighty works – have not been in harmony with His will and work.⁴

A parallel may be drawn from the life of Jeremiah, the prophet. In the beginning of the reign of King Zedekiah, the Lord instructed Jeremiah to wear a yoke symbolizing the captivity his people would suffer under Babylonian rule. Soon, however, a prophet arose, named Hananiah, contradicting the word of the Lord.⁵ Although Jeremiah indicated he would welcome the reprieve Hananiah spoke of, Jeremiah also reminded Hananiah of the test of a true prophet.⁶ Hananiah responded by breaking Jeremiah's yoke and delivering

² Matthew 7:15-23 KJV / Matthew 7:30-33 IV

³ cf. Matthew 12:44

⁴ Matthew 7:30 (7:21 KJV) with I John 2:17

⁵ Jeremiah 28:1-4

⁶ Jeremiah 28:5-9

a prophecy in turn to all those present, a false prophecy stating that the Lord would shorten the time they would be under Babylonian rule.⁷ Jeremiah then “went his way.” But the Lord told Jeremiah to return and tell Hananiah the consequences of his rebellion (his false prophecy).

Then the word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah the prophet, after that Hananiah the prophet had broken the yoke from off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, saying, Go and tell Hananiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord; Thou hast broken the yokes of wood; but thou shalt make for them yokes of iron. For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; I have put a yoke of iron upon the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they shall serve him; and I have given him the beasts of the field also. Then said the prophet Jeremiah unto Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah; The Lord hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie. Therefore thus saith the Lord; Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth; this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the Lord. (Jeremiah 28:12-16)

Through the prophesying of Jeremiah, the Lord had announced how He had established the kingdom of Babylon and how all other kingdoms, including Judah, must submit to its authority.⁸ Further, the Lord warned the people and rulers of Judah not to rebel against His pronouncement by listening to anyone contradicting His instruction.⁹ Yet, the prophet Hananiah arose and taught rebellion by prophesying falsely a shortened sentence. For this he would lose his life – just like the false prophets of whom Jesus spoke.¹⁰

According to Jesus Christ, false prophets will indeed arise again, but we are not to listen to them.¹¹ Like Hananiah, these false prophets of our day will presume to cut short the judgments which God pronounces on the lives of many people. Although they may do many mighty things in the Lord’s name, because their action is not in accord with His express will, they will be cast out from our Lord’s presence in the last day.¹²

In Jeremiah’s time, the Lord had expressly stated that instead of resisting the dominion of Babylon, the prophets should have prayed that no more vessels from the house of the Lord would be carried away.¹³ But they failed to heed this warning; consequently, the Lord pronounced that the remaining vessels would also be taken. If we are to learn the lesson God sought to teach the people’s to whom Jeremiah was called to minister, we must seek to “make intercession to the Lord of hosts,” seeking that no more would be lost instead of attempting to reverse the judgments of God by prophesying falsely.

That is, we must not presume what constitutes doing good. Rather, we must work in concert with God, whose stated work it is to bring to pass our immortality and eternal

⁷ Jeremiah 28:10-11

⁸ Jeremiah 27:1-8

⁹ Jeremiah 27:9-15

¹⁰ Matthew 7:15-23 KJV / Matthew 7:30-33 IV

¹¹ Matthew 7:15-23 KJV / Matthew 7:30-33 IV

¹² For an expanded discussion on this topic, see pages 7-10 of the following document:

http://www.hisworkmanship.net/index_files/Booklets/AsWeForgive0405reformatorig.pdf

¹³ Jeremiah 27:16-18

life.¹⁴ Those Jesus Christ will rebuke at the last day will be those who do not actually labor with Him unto this same end in the lives of those they affect. They are they who have labored for a different end, one they have presumed or imagined, not one inspired by God's love.¹⁵

Instead of having a sound understanding of His plan of redemption, and then working in concert with Him to fulfill His will (like the sons of Mosiah¹⁶), they worked contrary to His purposes, supposing to themselves that they knew what was best for others, or at least assuming they knew what God intended for each person they ministered to – such as prophesying over them, casting out of them evil spirits, or working miracles in their lives.

In failing to coordinate their efforts with the Lord, they separated themselves from Him and His kingdom and hindered others who attempted to enter therein.¹⁷ And so He will say to them, “Depart from me ye that work iniquity.”¹⁸

How can doing good be called iniquity? It is as simple as how Jesus described it. What they did, though it appeared to them and to others to be good, was outside the bounds of His will, wisdom, and work, specifically His eternal work and glory. Plainly stated, they failed to listen to Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd and Bishop of their souls and the souls of others. They strayed from His ordinances. Not necessarily in a technical sense – in terms of the procedures involved. Rather, they stray from Him and from His involvement in each and every situation they impacted contrary to His will.

Upon teaching me these understandings, the Lord then applied them to the young, wheelchair bound girl and her situation and condition. If she had been healed in a time when most believed she could and should have been healed, her father and mother would have been deprived (robbed) of the opportunity to learn to love in the much deeper manner her father had describe to us, a level of love the Lord was leading them unto.

Since I had been focused on the girl's apparent physical needs – having a short term, earth-bound view of the matter – I failed to see all that God was actually accomplishing in this situation according to His own eternal purposes. I was indeed humbled to learn of this bigger, more expansive picture. I definitely did not want to be one of those He rebukes at the last days, one to whom He says He does not know or one that does not know Him.

It appears to be all too easy for us to fixate on things involving the here and now without fully addressing the weightier issues, meaning that which is best for the eternal welfare of each soul. This, the Lord explained, is why it is written that our God requires us to not only do justly and love mercy, but more especially to walk humbly with Him as did Enoch and his people.¹⁹ Only in this way will we begin to understand what to pray for as we should.²⁰

Summarized, God has a much deeper and profound plan and activities in place, things we often miss because of our preoccupation with “the here and now.”²¹ Therefore, like

¹⁴ D&C 22:23b

¹⁵ cf. Jude 1:14-25

¹⁶ Alma 12:12-14

¹⁷ Luke 16:21

¹⁸ Matthew 7:33 IV (7:23 KJV)

¹⁹ Micah 6:8 with Genesis 7:77

²⁰ see Romans 8:26 with Romans 8:14

²¹ see Isaiah 55:1-13 with Jeremiah 29:11-14 IV

the Apostle Paul, we must seek the Lord earnestly when infirmities enter into our lives or the lives of those around us.²² And like Paul we must also be willing then to abide by the Lord's reply to our prayers through diligently seeking Him and His will.²³

The Workings and Results of Agency

This, however, is not the whole of the matter. We must not simply assume that everything which happens in our lives or in the lives of others is specifically according to God's will and plan for us. There are many factors, many forces, many influences, etc., in this life, that work for both good and for evil. Therefore, we must be on our guard not to fall prey to the evil simply assuming it's God's will.²⁴

God has given the hosts of heaven, the angels, their agency just as He has given us our agency, each to act for themselves.²⁵ Consequently, with so many agents acting according to their own wills and purposes, most assuredly not all things have, are, or will be done in concert with God and His will – remembering that God has many enemies that do wickedly, including a third of the angels that fell with Satan and were cast to the earth.²⁶

While not all things are orchestrated by God, as the Apostle Paul assures us, the Lord is able to bring about good from all that transpires in the lives of those who love Him and are the called according to His purpose.²⁷ Even still, we must not be complacent in the various matters of our lives. We must seek to discern between the evil and the good, to judge in the light of Jesus Christ.²⁸ Yes, we are to cast our cares upon Him,²⁹ but we are not called to live careless lives. We are called to be child-like, but not childish. Meaning, we are to seek to live wisely in this fallen world by seeking the Lord and His wisdom.³⁰

To illustrate this point, in the Word of Wisdom the Lord tells us, "In consequence of evils and designs which do and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men in the last days, I have warned you, and forewarn you, by giving unto you this word of wisdom by revelation."³¹ The Lord then tells us that we would be wise to take care what we eat, etc.

In light of this council, recall that one of the great warnings found in the record of the Book of Mormon concerns secret combinations of people who seek power and wealth at the expense of others – if it were not so, we would not need an FBI or similar federal and state agencies. Therefore, we would be wise to be like Chief Captain Moroni, and live by the faith he exemplified, which was to seek the Lord and do according to His command.³² If we would so live by faith, we are assured that Satan would have no power among us (ibid).

Until that day in which the Lord disposes of His enemies, there will be victims in this

²² see II Corinthians 12:7-10

²³ see Mosiah 1:119-120 with D&C 42:12c-12f, etc.

²⁴ Moroni 7:10-18

²⁵ see II Nephi 1:116-120, etc.

²⁶ cf. Moroni 7:10-18 with Revelation 12:8-12, D&C 76:3-4, etc.

²⁷ Romans 8:28

²⁸ cf. Moroni 7:10-18, etc.

²⁹ Philippians 4:4-8

³⁰ cf. James 1:5 & 3:17

³¹ D&C 86

³² Alma 21:132-142

fallen world, a world where evil and conspiring men act out their wills. Abel's blood was the first such testimony of how such evil and conspiring men have victims. God's answer to such is simply this: Vengeance is mine saith the Lord, I will repay (as found in the discussion of Romans 12).

Every person who has, is, or will yet live may rest assured that each and every one of us will be brought before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ and will be required to give an accounting of all our deeds, actions, thoughts, etc.³³ None will escape being brought before Jesus Christ to give an account of their stewardship.

But why exactly do situations exist such that someone can kill another person, or that someone can abuse or disrupt the lives of others? Simply asked, why are bad things allowed to happen? Or in terms of God's responsibility in such matters, how can God be a loving God and yet permit such bad things to happen?

Really the question is this: Can there be free will (agency) without there actually being such a thing as free will? Can we act for ourselves without being enabled to act for ourselves? Can a loving God actually be a loving God without giving us our agency – to carry out our loving devotion toward those we love?

Some may ask, isn't it a matter of intervention? Why doesn't God get more involved and stop all the troubles found in this life? The answer is again straightforward. God is very involved, much more than is apparent to us. But He is involved in such a way that His involvement works for our immortality and eternal life, our eternal welfare, not merely our convenience and comfort in this life.

According to His word, a "rest" is promise to all those who overcome in this life.³⁴ But we must note that the *rest* He offers to us does not come in this life, only after this life; and it comes to those who overcome this world of sin and depravation through faith in Jesus Christ.³⁵

God gives us the desires of our hearts.³⁶ He does so because He loves us. His commandment to love Him with our whole soul and being is so we may enjoy all that He has prepared for those who love Him.³⁷

Now back to the question as to why God does not apparently intentionally intervene to stop all of the suffering in the here and now. Who is to take responsibility for their actions if God were to always intervene (at least to a level that restricts our expression of free will)? God can intervene but how will this mature us? Having the capacity to love requires that we take responsibility for our actions and expending our resources. Still it is easier for us to ask why God does not do something to stop all this madness in the world, to prevent all this harm and evil.

The answer is our Lord has indeed done something that is infinite and eternal. He was lifted up upon the cross to draw all people unto Himself.³⁸ He took up His cross because of His love for the world. Now He calls us to take up ours and follow Him. But will we come unto Him? His ways are not our ways.³⁹ His wisdom is not in keeping

³³ see Alma 9:21-32 with II Corinthians 5:10,11

³⁴ Luke 12:40-43, Hebrews 4:1-2, Revelation 2-3, II Nephi 11:95-105, etc.

³⁵ Revelation 21,22, etc.

³⁶ Alma 15:55-56

³⁷ I Corinthians 2:9-16

³⁸ John 12, III Nephi 12, etc.

³⁹ Isaiah 55:6-11

with our way of thinking.⁴⁰ Consequently, many people do not choose to follow Him. Rather, they choose their own approaches and end up hurting themselves and other people.

On the other hand, those that take up their cross and follow Jesus, while they do not fully find their reward in this life by so living, there yet awaits for them the blessed promise of eternal life with God in His kingdom.

Jesus assures us that in this life we will have difficulties.⁴¹ We will have much tribulation in entering the kingdom of heaven Paul assures us.⁴² This life is a temporary but probationary state.⁴³ In it we are to prepare to meet God. Thus Jesus says, those who love their lives in this world will lose them, but those who hate their lives in this world will have eternal life.⁴⁴

This world is a bitter place in and of itself, as those who live without God soon experience. But the promise of heaven inspires those who love God to press forward to the tree of life through the mists of darkness and the shafts in the whirlwinds.⁴⁵

In the words of Ether, those who believe in God hope for a better world.⁴⁶ The promise of all tears being wiped away comes in the world beyond. Such a blessed state is reserved for the life to come. Then will the lion and the calf, the wolf and the lamb lie down in peace and there will be no more violence. The Prince of Peace will come, and His reign will be most glorious.⁴⁷

In this life we taste the bitter so that we may know to prize the good.⁴⁸ In the life to come we will receive the prize which is good, even the One who is good.

Though the Lord warns and forewarns us, we often fail to heed His voice. Consequently we get hurt and/or we hurt others. We go contrary to God's word, we suffer, and then wonder why certain things happen to us. Notwithstanding such tendencies, God is merciful and saves us, interceding for us many times over on a daily basis. Oh the profound goodness and longsuffering care of our wondrous God! Oh that we would praise Him forever and ever.⁴⁹

Because of the complicating mix of good and evil factors in this life, we have been commanded to ask, seek, and knock for wisdom in all things:⁵⁰

*But ye are commanded in all things to ask of God, who giveth liberally, and that which the Spirit testifies unto you, even so I would that you should do in all holiness of heart, walking uprightly before me, **considering the end of your salvation**, doing all things with prayer and thanksgiving, that ye may not be seduced by evil spirits, or doctrines of devils, or the commandments of men, for some are of men, and others of devils. Wherefore, beware, lest ye are deceived, and that ye may not be deceived, seek ye*

⁴⁰ cf. Romans 8:1-14

⁴¹ John 15:17-16:33

⁴² Acts 14:22

⁴³ Alma 9 & 19

⁴⁴ John 12:25

⁴⁵ I Nephi 2 & 3 with Helaman 2:74,75

⁴⁶ Ether 5:4

⁴⁷ Isaiah 2, 6,7,9, etc.

⁴⁸ Genesis 6:57

⁴⁹ See Psalm 107 with 103

⁵⁰ see Matthew 7:12,13 along with James 1:5

earnestly the best gifts, always remembering for what they are given. (D&C 46:3b-4a)

We must not act presumptuously, but in wisdom. We must not assume that everything happens because God wills it to be so or that He simply permits it. This life involves a battle for the souls of the children of men.⁵¹ As has been said by others, the sin of omission is as bad as the sin of commission. Therefore, Jesus commands us to actively ask, seek, and knock and then do the will of God. What His Spirit of truth, the Comforter, directs, that is what we are to do.

Often the hard part is our ability or willingness to understand and/or to accept His answer – perhaps because it sounds so foreign to our understanding or perspective, i.e. to our way of thinking. Remembering that there is a way that seems right unto man, but the ends thereof are death, we can check ourselves and more fully rely upon the wisdom which comes from above.

In the end, God has planned greater things for us through the things we suffer. It's called the sieve of vanity.⁵² And He has subjected us to this vanity (tribulation) in the hope of bringing us forth as His dear children.⁵³

Humble Submission Unto Obedience

Consider Naaman, the leper.⁵⁴ The prophet Elisha gave him the word of God to wash himself in the river Jordon seven times. This did not make sense to Naaman and he balked at doing so until his servant prevailed upon him to do according to the word of God. There was nothing magical about washing 7 times in the Jordon. It was the act of humble obedience and trust in the One into whose care he was called to commit himself. He obeyed. The promised blessing for humble submission to instruction followed (as it does with all the meek).

Unique requirements were placed upon Abraham as well when commanded to offer his son on an altar.⁵⁵ It would do no good for someone to mimic this command or setting. Obedience and bearing witnessed through devotion to God is what brings the blessing of a deeper relationship with Him, which may be unique at times to us individually, but not always.

In the words of the apostle Paul, all who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.⁵⁶ So that God may prove and deepen our faithfulness to Him (i.e. our faith), He may or may not give us instructions similar to someone else. Otherwise we may find it easy to copy their obedience and think in so doing we have fulfilled our obedience. It is not that simple. Having said that, it is important to note that there are common commandments which require common obedience, all of which we must not leave undone.⁵⁷

Many more examples from scripture could be cited. The point I am attempting to make here is simply this, we are dealing with God; He created all things and knows all

⁵¹ cf. D&C 76:3,4, etc.

⁵² Isaiah 30:28

⁵³ Romans 8:18-25

⁵⁴ II Kings 5

⁵⁵ Hebrew 10:36 with Romans 4

⁵⁶ Romans 8:14

⁵⁷ Matthew 23:20

things.⁵⁸ In the words of the apostle, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God.⁵⁹

Our God is not sitting around wringing His hands wondering why He started all of this stuff in motion. He has a plan, an amazing plan which was worked out from the foundation of the world.⁶⁰ What is even more amazing, and what makes Him God and us not, is His ability to 1) create us, 2) know everything about us, 3) place us in the various, but seemingly diverse circumstances we find ourselves, and 4) still give each and everyone one of us agency – the free will to act for ourselves; to choose good or evil – and then justly judge us according to our choices and actions in this life – and all of this with an eternal purpose and perspective in mind. For Him to be able to know what we will do without taking away our agency is simply mind boggling. Still, that is what makes Him God and us not.

God's Sovereignty and His Preeminent Volition and Prerogative

The Apostle James writes that if any of us lack wisdom, we are to ask God. Well, unwise people are they who do not think they lack wisdom, so they don't ask. But the meek, those who shall inherit the earth (remember Jesus said He is meek and lowly), will ask, seek and knock because they do not presume to know of themselves. Conversely, the proud and those who do presumptuously never see the need to counsel with the Wonderful Counselor ... and so the Lord our Savior, Jesus Christ, has said that He will not open up unto them the gate which leads heavenward.⁶¹

For those who love the Lord, the Apostle Paul assures us all things will work together for their good.⁶² Even though there are those who intend different things than God intends, God is greater and He works for our good, i.e. He knows how to use everything that happens in this life for the good of His children, come what may, either by His design or the designs of those around us.⁶³ While the proud and those who do wickedly – which evil is well within their capabilities and opportunities given their agency – will be judged accordingly, those injured by them will be comforted, if not in this life, in the eternal life to come. For it is written:

God having provided some better things for them through their sufferings, for without sufferings they could not be made perfect. (Hebrews 11:40)

The above discussion is meant to affirm God's sovereignty and His preeminent volition and prerogative in all matters of His creation. It is also to affirm that He truly has loved us so much that He has given us free will to respond or not, to live according to His love or turn and rebel against Him. As such, it is also to affirm Jesus' words when He said that His Father works and that He likewise works; and He further states that those who believe in Him will also work the works of the Father.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ see Mosiah 2:13-17

⁵⁹ Hebrews 10:31

⁶⁰ e.g. Alma 19 with Luke 14

⁶¹ see II Nephi 6:79-84

⁶² see Romans 8:26-28

⁶³ cf. Genesis 50:20 with II Nephi 11:96

⁶⁴ see John 5:17 & 14:12

God's Laws: The Impersonal Side

When considering illnesses that afflict us or those around us it is very important to keep in mind that there is an impersonal side of God's creation as well, specifically the operation of natural laws. It is appropriate for us to understand that God's laws, such as gravity, climatic and biological forces (e.g. cold and heat, diseases), etc., impose pressures on our lives in an impersonal and an often unforgiving way.

God has set the law gravity in place and we have been given the freedom to navigate within its influence. If anyone of us were to walk off of a cliff, we should expect to fall. Similarly, if we take a walk in the arctic without the proper preparation or gear, we should expect to freeze for failing to take care of ourselves. If we do not stay hydrated, we should expect to not remain healthy long.

As an engineer, I appreciate some of the thought and care that has gone into making buildings, bridges, etc., safe so that people can use them in the confidence of not falling. Likewise, as engineers we use our understanding of the natural forces surrounding us when designing aircraft – so when I committed myself to board many different airplanes over the past several years I exercised the confidence that the engineers and mechanics that built them as well as those companies and agencies that maintain them and oversee the operation of these flights have done their job. If they haven't, all my expectations and hopes, etc., may very well not be met.

As an example, recently my son drove through an intersection, expecting the cross-traffic headed east and west to honor the stop light. Unfortunately it was early and the sun was in the eyes of the east bound motorists and one driver ran the red light. Did God orchestrate this event? No, I do not believe directly. But His laws worked just as designed. That is, the sun came up in the east in the morning, the laws of motion and of momentum leading to the collision worked, the inability of a person to perhaps see clearly through a windshield with the sun shining directly at them, etc. all worked. So in a way one might say God did cause the accident indirectly – but in an impersonal way (remembering God is not a respecter of persons – His rain falls on the just and the unjust alike) by placing all the contributing laws into motion.

But did He actively cause the accident (and possibly all such accidents like it)? It is possible that He did (though we may not know this for sure in this life). In considering such a question we must first evaluate whether or not the affirmative answer to the question is consistent with God's word. We can be confident that He did not act in such a way as to violate anyone's agency in the accident. For example, if each driver had humbly and faithfully asked Him to guide them that morning, we should be able to trust that He did act in such a way as to guide them because He is faithful to His promises. We can also trust that He would have intervened in such a way as to influence their actions for good. But each driver would have had to actually be willing to yield to His directions (even if it did not make sense to them at the time) and respond quickly according to His guidance – not just simply assume He would take care of every little detail without them needing to take ownership of their actions in the matters at hand. (His wisdom takes all such activities into a more profound level as well. Meaning, He acts according to His wisdom and will – all of which are for our eternal welfare and benefit. So an accident may in fact be wisdom, but not necessarily orchestrated by God.)

God is not our auto pilot (meaning, in part, that we must take care not to tempt Him). Nor does He intend to be so (expect as He sees fit). Still it is written that our God is able to do above and beyond what we expect or hope for.⁶⁵ Yet again, He has made us agents and stewards, and expects us to act accordingly. This, our agency, He holds sacred, and refuses to violate. Those who do attempt to violate it, may very well be cast down with the evil one who sought so to do from the beginning.⁶⁶

Therefore, it is infinitely important we understand that God has given us our agency and expects us to act for ourselves within His will and wisdom.⁶⁷ Yes, He can intervene, but He is set on making us better stewards of our time and our talents, not in this life alone, but more especially in the eternal realm while we are in the preparatory state.

Always doing things for us, or always bailing us out of troubles, does not foster a maturing character within us. Rather, it fosters spoiled children. And we can rest assured that God does not have any spoiled children. He will have His way with us. We are His workmanship. He will discipline and chasten us – and this because He loves us.⁶⁸ On the other hand, God works and labors so that we will more fully rely upon Him. He does this so we no longer trust in the arm of flesh, which leads to suffering.

God placed Adam and Eve in the garden and told them if they partook of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they would die. Notwithstanding His warning, they did partake and they did die physically – but before a final pronouncement was made on their eternal state, they were placed in a probationary state with sufficient time to prepare to meet Him, the One who created them.⁶⁹

Another example is the warning John wrote in the end of the Book of Revelation, the concluding book in the Bible. He warned against adding to or taking away. This meant that people could actually do so (to their own peril). Like with Adam and Eve, the knowledge of consequences was presented to them. Nonetheless, they chose the consequence of disobedience.

Perhaps this sounds a bit too clinical, but some things are severely clinical and impersonal. As Paul wrote:

Well; because of unbelief they [the house of Israel] were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high minded, but fear; for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold the goodness and severity of God; on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness; otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. (Romans 11:20-22)

While some individuals refuse to believe in God because of the suffering they see in the world, their denial is really related to their refusing to take responsibility for themselves and their actions. Our Lord has not left Himself without a witness.⁷⁰ We see God's laws in action and we have been given knowledge and intelligence in the day we were created. Therefore, God is just in holding mankind accountable for what goes on in

⁶⁵ Ephesians 3:20

⁶⁶ Genesis 3:1-5 IV

⁶⁷ e.g. II Nephi 1:117-120

⁶⁸ Hebrews 12:1-12 with Ephesians 2:10

⁶⁹ Alma 8,9

⁷⁰ Romans 1:20

this world. At the same time He remembers that we are but dust and has and continues to show us great compassion.⁷¹

God sets the bounds and times of our habitation, i.e. the venue for our lives.⁷² And He sets before us the way of life and the way of death.⁷³ We then are free to choose the path of our response to all that He has established, to the good and to the evil that is present all around us, including the environment into which He has placed us (as it is with all His creation). We are not free to choose what the consequences will be for disobedience. But we can choose between the consequence for doing good or for doing evil.

We would be wise then to watch out for the many things that can and do impact our lives, the many things that operate upon our lives without respect to who we are. Otherwise we can perish for lack of understanding and wisdom.⁷⁴ And so we have been admonished to call upon the Lord while He is near:

218 Therefore may God grant unto you, my brethren, that ye may begin to exercise your faith unto repentance, that ye begin to call upon his holy name, that he would have mercy upon you; yea, cry unto him for mercy; for he is mighty to save; 219 Yea, humble yourselves, and continue in prayer unto him; cry unto him when ye are in your fields; yea, over all your flocks; cry unto him in your houses, yea, over all your household, both morning, mid- day, and evening; yea, cry unto him against the power of your enemies; yea, cry unto him against the devil, who is an enemy to all righteousness. 220 Cry unto him over the crops of your fields, that ye may prosper in them: cry over the flocks of your fields, that they may increase. 221 But this is not all: ye must pour out your souls in your closets, and your secret places, and in your wilderness; 222 Yea, and when you do not cry unto the Lord, let your hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto him continually for your welfare, and also for the welfare of those who are around you. 223 And now behold, my brethren, I say unto you, Do not suppose that this is all; for after ye have done all these things, if ye turn away the needy, and the naked, and visit not the sick and afflicted, and impart of your substance if ye have, to those who stand in need; 224 I say unto you, If ye do not any of these things, behold, your prayer is vain, and availeth you nothing, and ye are as hypocrites who do deny the faith; 225 Therefore if ye do not remember to be charitable, ye are as dross, which the refiners do cast out, (it being of no worth,) and is trodden under foot of men. 226 And now, my brethren, I would that after ye have received so many witnesses, seeing that the holy scriptures testify of these things, come forth and bring fruit unto repentance; 227 Yea, I would that ye would come forth and harden not your hearts any longer; for behold, now is the time, and the day of your salvation; and therefore, if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you. 228 For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God: yea, behold, the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors. (Alma 16:218-228)

⁷¹ Psalm 103:1-22 with Lamentations 3:20-26

⁷² Acts 17:26

⁷³ Jeremiah 21:8

⁷⁴ cf. Hosea 4:6

Some illnesses, for example, may come upon us because of neglect on our part or the part of others, or they may be unavoidable imposed on us because of factors outside our control (e.g. epidemics or contamination, war, birth defects, genetics, etc.). In parallel with these, there are spiritual diseases of the soul, such as bitterness and envy, which can attach themselves to our lives like parasites if we are not alert and found watching.⁷⁵ As such, we must learn to be wise in all we say and do.⁷⁶

Another pit we can fall into is that of being overly familiar with God, to think that God will cover us no matter what we choose to do. This is one of the devil's most subtle temptations and lines of reasoning he attempts to use on us. "Isn't God good?" "Isn't He a loving God?" "Why then all the pain and suffering?" Such subtle questioning by Satan is meant to lead us away from God's goodness and mercy. This type of questioning can make for a fast and hard fall if one fails to heed the warnings of the Lord.

In our infancy we expected our parents to catch us if we fell. But as we grew older, this game became not so practical or appropriate. God's laws, like that of gravity, have been set in motion. And like big cog wheels, we can get caught in them if we are not careful.

Yes, God does look out for us, but our God has also placed us as stewards within this wondrous but dangerous world. He has placed us here with responsibilities to care for ourselves and each other. We must learn, therefore, to live within the governing laws, both those that are impersonal as well as those which come into our lives by the choice of others.⁷⁷ And this we must do with an eye to God's glory, with our hearts set upon His eternal purposes, i.e. that His will may be fulfilled in each and every one of our lives.

In this regard, it has been helpful for me to consider the phrase, "All that were spared," in the following verse.

O all ye that are spared, because ye were more righteous than they, will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you?
(III Nephi 4:41)

The Lord had imposed judgments upon the wicked (those He knew to be wicked by their choice) in the Americas just prior to Him extending this invitation to the people who remained. Both the punishment He imposed on the wicked as well as the invitation to the more righteous did not negate or violate their agency. Both judgments were a necessary part of agency in the lives of those exercised by them.⁷⁸

Agency: the Ultimate Stewardship

Understanding agency (free will) as stewardship is critical to understanding how and why things happen to us. As stewards, we are free to choose how we respond to God's commands and His laws, but we are not free to choose the consequences of obeying or not obeying Him. This includes both physical laws as well as His spiritual, moral, emotional, mental, etc., laws.

⁷⁵ cf. Luke 21:36

⁷⁶ Psalm 34:12-16...

⁷⁷ cf. I Timothy 2:1-3, Romans 13:1-10, Hebrews 13:15-17, etc.

⁷⁸ cf. II Nephi 1:119-125, Mosiah 1:126, 8:83-89, Alma 1:127-130, 8:102-104, 15:56, 19:64-80, etc.

Further, we must understand that, as the Husbandman, it is God who is pruning us so that we bear Him more fruit.⁷⁹ He takes away dead wood so healthy spouts can shoot forth. While this pruning cycle may hurt us temporally, our heavenly Father's work in our lives prepares us solidly for eternity.

While it is possible for others (both other human or spiritual beings) to use their agency and hurt us or others (an increasing problem in the world today), it is likewise possible for us to choose how we react to their actions. So, what if they do impact us? The Lord has said that vengeance is His, He will repay. But we are required to forgive and allow Him to mediate in all such situations, whether in this life or the life to come. While not everything is fair in this life, nothing will go unnoticed or unaddressed by our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, in the words of Jacob, "*Oh be wise: what can I say more.*"⁸⁰

Remember, God is fully capable and willing to be proactive in our lives. He has a prerogative and uses it in our lives moment by moment as He sees fit. Also remember, He is good at what does.

And the Lord God spake unto Moses, saying, The heavens, they are many and they can not be numbered unto man, but they are numbered unto me, for they are mine; and as one earth shall pass away, and the heavens thereof, even so shall another come; and there is no end to my works, neither to my words; for this is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality, and eternal life of man. (D&C 22:23a,b)

⁷⁹ John 15:1-8

⁸⁰ Jacob 4:17