

# The Providence of God

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## GOD'S PROVIDENCE

The word "**providence**" (pronoia) is found only once in the Bible, a usage which refers to human providence (Acts 24:2), and yet **Divine Providence** permeates the pages of Holy Writ from Genesis to Revelation! This great truth ought to cause all of God's children to shout "Hallelujah! Our God Reigns!" Amen. Indeed a healthy understanding of God's providences should produce praise from His people, for as John Piper rightly said...

**In all the setbacks of your life as a believer,  
God is plotting for your joy.**

**Louis Berkouwer** challenges the modern church's belief in **divine providence** observing that...

This total and universal aspect of the Church's confession (**of divine providence**) renders it unacceptable to many as too simple an answer to the urgency of our times. Can all this, all this that fills men's hearts, fall within the circle of a Divine Providence? Can man with honesty and clear conscience still believe it? It seems as though this confession—God's rule over all things, more than other confessions—were thrown into the crucible of the times. This does not mean that in fairer days the Providence of God was never doubted or denied. Even in eras of peace and quiet, when man still had confidence in the inevitable gradual improvement of life, there were burning questions to disturb the honest mind. The lot of man in sickness, suffering, and death has always raised questions about God's Providence. But the question forces itself far more directly and disturbingly upon us in times of all-

embracing crisis... These are times in which the Church of Christ must ask herself whether she still has the courage, in profound and unshakable faith, in boundless confidence, to proclaim the **Providence of God**. Or is she possessed of secret doubts fed by daily events? Can she still speak of God's rule over all things, of His holy presence in this world? Can she yet proclaim confidently His unlimited control over the world and life—war and peace, East and West, pagans ... and Jews? Dare she still, with eyes open to the facts of life—no less than those who from the facts conclude an imperative atheism—still confess her old confession? ([The Providence of God - Chapter 1 - "The Crisis of the Providence Doctrine in Our Century"](#))

**Comment:** Berkouwer's question should challenge all of God's children (Jn 1:11,12,13) -- Do we really believe and have firm, unshakeable confidence in the great doctrine of divine providence? May we study the Scriptures diligently for the answer (Ro 10:17-note) and as we do, may the Spirit lead us into all truth (Jn 16:13) regarding the Providence of God. Amen.

**William Graham MacDonald** observes that **providence** is...

God's activity throughout history in providing for the needs of human beings, especially those who follow Him in faith. **Providence** occurs because God cares about the universe and everyone in it. All through the centuries of human existence there have been those who took great comfort in the fact of providence. It means realizing at certain places in life that God has been there before. It is the evidence that God has not left this planet alone in the vast universe or forgotten for a moment the human situation. God visits, touches, communicates, controls, and intervenes, coming before and between man and his needs. Providence is ground for thankfulness. ([Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible Walter A. Elwell Editor. Baker Books](#))

**Providence** is defined in our English dictionaries as the act of seeing and providing or preparing for the future, and Biblically refers to God's foresight and power to watch over and protect and provide for His creatures ([See more on definition](#)). Listen to the words of Jesus that give us a wonderful description of **divine providence**...

Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? (A [rhetorical question](#) - Sparrows were cheap among men, but highly valued by God!) And yet (**contrast** - **Ask** "*What is Jesus contrasting?*") not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father (*What does this imply about divine providence?*). But the very hairs of your head are all numbered (*By Whom?*). Therefore (**term of conclusion** - *What is Jesus concluding and why? How should we respond?* Remember to **interrogate** the text!) **do not fear**; you are of more value than many sparrows. (Mt 10:29-31)

**Comment:** John Blanchard has aptly said that "*The same God Who controls the sun cares for the sparrow*", which begs this question... "Why should be so anxious and fearful about what tomorrow holds, when we know the One Who holds tomorrow?"

Note that Jesus' command **do not fear** is a **present imperative** with the negative which could be paraphrased "*Stop fearing*" or "*Don't begin fearing*." Note also that this command is based on truth, the truth that God is in control of every sparrow and every hair on our head! As the theologians like to say, God's **imperatives** (imperative mood) are always based on His **indicatives** (indicative mood), which ultimately is His Word of truth. Our challenge as believers today is to obey Jesus, but in our own strength **we cannot keep even one** of the hundreds of commands in the New Testament. So how do we obey? How do we "*work out our salvation*" (Phil 2:12-note)? Jesus did not leave us as orphans (Jn 14:18 - *How has He come to us today?* See Ro 8:9 "Spirit of Christ"), but sent the promised Holy Spirit (Lk 24:48, Jn 7:37, 38, 39, 14:16, 26, 16:7Acts 1:4, 8 where "power" = dunamis = ability to accomplish!) Who now indwells and enables every believer (1Cor 3:16, 1Co 6:19note, Ro 8:9-note) to obey the divine commands by giving us both "the **desire** to obey Him and the **power** to do what pleases Him" (Php 2:13NLT-note, See the same truth in **Ezekiel 36:27** [*What and Who is God's provision? What is our responsibility?* Cp this same pattern in Php 2:12,13] which is given in the context of God's promise to Israel of the **New Covenant** [see allusions in OT , Jer 31:31-34], a promise Jesus announced to His Jewish disciples at the last Passover [Lk 22:20] and which He fulfilled on the Cross [cp Jn 19:30-note]). (**See sermon by C H Spurgeon on [Matthew 10:30 - Providence](#)**)

**John MacArthur** writes that "**providence** is a term that has to do with God not interfering with the normal processes of life but orchestrating all of those contingencies and all of those thoughts and actions to effect exactly what He wants, when He wants, with whom He wants, where He wants." (From sermon [God, The Savior of Men](#))

## **PROVIDENCE: GOD'S GRACIOUS OVERSIGHT OF THE UNIVERSE**

**Ray Pritchard** writes that **providence** is...

"**God's gracious oversight of the universe**" Every one of those words is important. God's providence is one aspect of his grace. Oversight means that he directs the course of affairs. The word universe tells us that God not only knows the big picture, he also concerns himself with the tiniest details. Here are five statements that unfold the meaning of God's providence in more detail.

He upholds all things.

He governs all events.

He directs everything to its appointed end.

He does this all the time and in every circumstance.

He does it always for his own glory.

The **doctrine of God's providence** teaches us several important truths: **First**, God cares about the tiniest details of life. Nothing escapes His notice for He is concerned about the small as well as the big. In fact, with God there is no big or small. He knows when a sparrow falls and he numbers the hairs on your head. He keeps track of the stars in the skies and the rivers that flow to the oceans. He sets the day of your birth, the day of your death, and he ordains everything that comes to pass in between. **Second**, he uses everything and wastes nothing. There are no accidents with God, only incidents. This includes events that seem to us to be senseless tragedies. **Third**, God's ultimate purpose is to shape His children into the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29). He often uses difficult moments and human tragedies to accomplish that purpose. Many verses in the Bible teach these truths, including Acts 17:28 ("in him we live and move and have our being"), Colossians 1:17 ("in him all things hold together"), Hebrews 1:3 ("sustaining all things by his powerful word"), Proverbs 16:9 ("in his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps."), and especially Psalm 115:3 ("Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him"). The doctrine of God's providence is really a combination of four other attributes:

Sovereignty—He is in control.

Predestination—He is in charge of how everything turns out.

Wisdom—He makes no mistakes.

Goodness—He has our best interests at heart.

In the words of R. C. Sproul, "**God doesn't roll dice.**" Nothing happens by chance. Ever. ([The Invisible Hand Coming to Grips With God's Providence - Read this sermon to see everything that occurred in Joseph's life "at just the right moment"!](#))

#### Related Resources:

- [Evil in God's Providential Rule James 1:13-15](#) - Ligonier Ministry
- [Providence and Prayer James 5:16b-18](#) - Ligonier Ministry
- [Providence and Evil James 1:13](#) - Ligonier Ministry
- [The Role of Prayer in God's Providence James 5:16b-18](#) - Ligonier Ministry

## GOD MOVES IN A MYSTERIOUS WAY

By [William Cowper \(bio by John Piper\)](#)

([Hauntingly beautiful Pictures w/ lyrics & guitar vocal-watch it in full screen](#))

([Lyrics w/ pictures & piano](#))

([Beautiful vocal by Lori Sealy-A MUST listen! Close your eyes. Ponder, even pray Cowper's profound lyrics!](#))

God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea,  
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never failing skill  
He treasures up His bright designs  
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;  
The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy and shall break  
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His grace;  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err  
And scan His work in vain;  
God is His own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain.

Here is a story that is said to be behind these incredibly insightful and beautiful words of Cowper's hymn. Reportedly this is the last hymn **William Cowper** ever wrote, and here is the story that is said to be behind it. Cowper often struggled with depression and doubt. One night he decided to commit suicide by drowning himself. He called a cab and told the driver to take him to the Thames River. However, thick fog came down and prevented them from finding the river (another version of the story has the driver getting lost deliberately). After driving around lost for a while, the cabby finally stopped and let Cowper out. To Cowper's surprise, he found himself on his own doorstep: God had sent the fog to keep him from killing himself. Even in our blackest moments, God watches over us. Yes, whether this story is true or not, in either case we can rest assured that our God ever watches over us dear tried and afflicted saints.

Here is another version of the story of Cowper's last hymn **'God Moves in a Mysterious Way...'**

Whatever form the pressures toward matrimony were taking, they were obviously causing deep psychological problems for Cowper, for on Friday, January 1, 1773, an hour or two after hearing Newton preach at the morning service in church, Cowper was walking in the fields around Olney when he was struck by a terrible premonition that the curse of madness was about to fall on him again. Struggling to make a declaration of his faith in poetic form before his mind was enclosed in the darkness of depression, he struggled home, picked up his pen, and wrote a hymn that many regard as a literary and spiritual masterpiece... Soon after writing these memorable lines, the "dreaded clouds" arrived, and Cowper's mind plunged into an abyss of madness. During the night of January 1–2, he had terrible dreams and hallucinations. In the middle of these nocturnal terrors he came to the insane conclusion that God had commanded him to take his own life in the manner of Abraham wielding his knife against his son Isaac. Apparently ignoring the point that in the Bible God intervened to prevent the fatal blow from being struck, Cowper attempted to obey this imaginary command. His suicide was thwarted by the action of Mary Unwin. She sent for Newton in the small hours of the morning. On arrival at Orchard Side, Newton was appalled by his friend's condition. ([John Newton From Disgrace to Amazing Grace by Jonathan Aitken and Philip Yancey](#) - a book that is difficult to put down and one I highly recommend)

## **PROVIDENCE MAKES ALL OF LIFE A MIRACLE!**

**R. Kent Hughes** writes that...

The sweet **doctrine of God's providence** is this: God **sovereignly** works in and through the everyday, non-miraculous events of life to effect His will. Such a God, of course, is great beyond our imaginings because He maintains all of life, involves Himself in all events, and directs all things to their appointed end while rarely interrupting the natural order of life (Ed: Is this mysterious? Absolutely, but don't explain it away just because you cannot comprehend it. Remember that one of God's attributes is that He is Incomprehensible). He is far greater than our imaginings because He arranges all of life to suit and effect His **providence**. This makes all of life a miracle. God provides and controls in three grand arenas—history, nature, and the lives of individual people. **God's providential control of life is illustrated by virtually every narrative in the Bible** His providence is an axiom (an established rule or generally accepted proposition or principle, a self-evident truth) for all biblical narrative...

The sweet providence of God is the province of God's people. The prophet Jeremiah sang of it: "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). Paul gave it this cherished expression: "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28-note). Christians, the most important thing about you is what you believe about God.

What you believe defines you. What you believe determines how you live. So I must ask, do you believe with your whole mind and heart that God is all-powerful? Do you believe with everything in you that God is spatially and specially present with you? Do you believe wholeheartedly that he knows everything, even your inarticulate words and thoughts before you say them? Do you believe that God is absolutely sovereign in all of life? Do you believe that God's providence is working in and through your life to effect your good? If so, you have embraced the God of Genesis and the Christ of the Bible because "in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Colossians 2:9-note). **And you are ready to live.** ([Genesis Beginning and Blessing - Preaching the Word](#))

## ARE YOU LOOKING AT THE WRONG SIDE OF THE RUG?

The Master is providentially interweaving the seemingly disconnecting strands of circumstances and live events in each of our lives in a way that is often difficult for us to perceive, but all of which are providentially perfect in the Master's sovereign hand and His perfect plan! (cp Ro 8:28, Ge 50:20). **C H Spurgeon** tells an anecdotal story which speaks to God's providential weavings in each of our lives...

I think it was Mrs. Hannah More who says that she went into a place where they were manufacturing a carpet. She said, "There is no beauty there."

The man said, "It is one of the most beautiful carpets you ever saw."

"Why, here is a piece hanging out, and it is all in disorder."

"Do you know why, ma'am? **You are looking at the wrong side of the carpet!**"

The etymology of **provident** is enlightening for it is derived from the Latin *providere* which is composed of *pro* = beforehand + *videre* = to see, which gives us a good picture of the meaning of **providence** - God sees beforehand! Obviously when applied to God, **providence** is closely related to God's omniscience (He sees all and knows all at all times). The distinction is that in His **providence**, God not only **sees** but **does!** In other words, God **provides** for the future which He alone can **see!** This transcendent, eternal truth will (or should) provide you comfort. However, the doctrine of divine providence might arouse anger or even frighten you, depending on what you believe about God the Father and Jesus His Son. Although theologians wax long and eloquent on this topic, in simple terms, the pivotal questions are "**Is God able?**" and "**Do I believe?**"

## HE IS ABLE!

**Here is a Short Exercise to Challenge and Encourage your faith** (Remember Ro 10:17-note): Study the following passages that have the phrase "**He is able**" (in the NAS translation)...

**Daniel 4:37-note** is from the mouth of one of the greatest rulers in history after he had been humbled by God!

**2Ti 1:12-note** are some of the last words of the greatest apostle in history as he prepares to meet his Maker.

**Hebrews 2:18-note** are some of the most comforting words ever penned for those who are being tested and tempted.

**Hebrews 7:25-note** are some of the most encouraging words ever written for those who wrestle with the doctrine of eternal security.

**Related Resource:** See full study on [GOD IS ABLE](#)

As **Spurgeon** once quipped "The **keys of providence** swing at the girdle of Christ. Believe it, Christian, nothing occurs here without the permit or the decree of your Savior... He that has gone to prepare a place for us by his presence has prepared the way to that place for us by his providence."

**Steven Cole** has some interesting thoughts in his sermon on "God's Providential Protection"...

"*What rotten luck I've been having lately!*" "I'm having a bad day!" "Oh, well, whatever will be will be, and there's nothing that we can do about it!" (Ed: The Spanish equivalent is "[Que Sera, Sera](#)" = "What will be, will be!" a beautiful but not Biblical song by Doris Day!) You've probably heard people say all of the above. Perhaps you've even said or thought something similar yourself at times. But all of those declarations are at odds with biblical truth, because each statement goes against the truth of **God's providence**. There is no such thing as luck or pure chance. If we have a bad day, it is because the Lord ordained these circumstances for our benefit. Bad days don't just happen! "Whatever will be will be" reflects a view of our circumstances as being caused by impersonal fate. The Bible often teaches and illustrates the doctrine of God's providence (I will give a definition later), and it should be a source of great comfort and instruction for every believer. It means that God is not distant, passive, or unconcerned with the daily events in our lives. Rather, as our loving and caring Heavenly Father, He actively governs the daily

events of our lives, usually behind the scenes, without in any way robbing us of the duty of making responsible choices... When we face trials and opposition in our service for the Lord, we should trust Him to protect us by His providence and to work out His sovereign plan for our lives... Deists deny God's providence by asserting that He created the world, but He is no longer actively involved in it. Others say that God is active in the events of the world, but that He is not sovereign over evil. Rather, evil is the result of free will. But the Bible teaches that God is actively controlling or directing even evil events and evil people in such a way as to accomplish His sovereign will, and yet He is not the author of evil and is not responsible for it (as Eph. 1:11-note states). But no evil person or act changes or thwarts God's sovereign will...

**Wayne Grudem** defines God's providence "God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that He (1) keeps them existing and maintaining the properties with which He created them; (2) cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do; and (3) directs them to fulfill His purposes."([Systematic Theology An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine Wayne Grudem](#)) ... (Cole amplifies Grudem's three points)

**(1) God's providence means preservation**, that "God keeps all created things existing and maintaining the properties with which He created them". Hebrews 1:3-note tells us that Christ "upholds all things by the word of His power." The Greek word translated "uphold" means to carry or bear. Grudem says, "It does not mean simply 'sustain,' but has the sense of active, purposeful control over the thing being carried from one place to another" (ibid.). Colossians 1:17-note also asserts that "all things hold together" in Christ. If Jesus were to "let go," the entire universe would instantly disintegrate! Thus God did not just design the laws of science and nature and step away from them. Rather, He actively maintains such laws.

**(2) God's providence means concurrence**, that "God cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do". This includes God's causing things to happen that we would think of as merely "natural" occurrences. For example, the Bible says that God causes the rain and snow to fall on earth, along with the wind to blow and the lightning to flash (Job 37:6-13; Ps. 135:7). God also gives food to the wild animals and birds (Ps. 104:27-29; Mt. 6:26). God governs what we might call random chance events, such as the casting of lots (Pr. 16:33). Also, God causes things to happen where His creatures also play a role. For example, I may water and fertilize my grass or a farmer his crops, but God causes them to grow. I can put water into the freezer, but God makes it freeze (Job 38:27, 29-30). God also governs human affairs. He determines the time, existence, and boundaries of the nations (Acts 17:26). He sets up rulers and takes them down again (Da 4:34-35; Ps. 22:28). He governs every aspect of our lives (Jer. 10:23; Pr. 16:9; 20:24), including the number of days that we will live (Ps. 139:16). He is even sovereign over evil, although He is not tainted in any way by it nor is He responsible for it (Ge 50:20; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; 1 John 1:5). But He uses evil men and events to carry out His sovereign plan, even as He is doing in our story with this evil plot to kill Paul.

**(3) God's providence means government**, that "God has a purpose in all that he does in the world and he providentially governs or directs all things in order that they accomplish his purposes". "He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'" (Da 4:35-note). God "works all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11-note).

**The doctrine of God's providence is very practical and comforting on a daily basis.** If we live in a world of random chance, it is a most scary place to be! You never know what bad things might happen to you or your loved ones, and so all you can do is hope for "good luck." Or, if as some Christians believe, God is not sovereign over evil, then when terrorists fly airplanes into the World Trade Center and kill thousands of people, or a crazy gunman kills your loved one, that's tragic, but there was nothing that God could have done about it, since He gave them "free will." But if even that evil event was under God's providence, then we know that He can work it together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Ro 8:28-note). Those who lost loved ones can know that those wicked men did not in any way thwart God's sovereign plan. Rather, those evil men were inadvertently carrying out His sovereign plan for history and they will face God's eternal judgment! Thus, God has a sovereign plan for each of us. Evil men cannot thwart God's purpose. God carries out His sovereign plan through His often behind-the-scenes providence. Finally, Trusting God to work sovereignly through His providence does not mean being passive or doing nothing. (For more explanation and exposition see Steven Cole's full sermon [God's Providential Protection: Acts 23:12-35](#))

## A "CHANCE" ROMANCE JUST HAPPENED TO HAPPEN

One of my favorite Biblical illustrations of God's wonderful providence is in the little book of Ruth where we read...

So she (Ruth the Moabitess) departed (from her mother in law's home) and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and **she happened** to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech. **Ruth 2:3-note**)

**Comment:** In Ruth chapter 1, Naomi's husband takes his family to Moab. Why? There was a famine in Bethlehem. Who controls famines? What would have happened if God had not allowed a famine in Bethlehem? Would Ruth the Moabitess ever

have ended up in Bethlehem? And so we begin to see the "links" in the chain of God's providential working behind the scenes in the history of nations and individuals. **Beloved, do you believe that He is working "behind the scenes" in your life?** Well, He is, whether you believe it or not! God has not "checked out," regardless of what you are experiencing. His is there. He is working. His is active. He is loving and caring. And He promises to complete the good work He has begun in you (Phil 1:6-note) and ultimately will cause all things to work together for good in your life (Ro 8:28-note). **Let the truth of the doctrine of divine providence permeate your mind and your heart, for as Jesus promised, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free!** (Jn 8:31, 32) This is the blessed benefit of God's providence. As you read through the Bible, consider placing a "P" in your Bible margin when the Spirit illuminates some aspect of God's providence, a truth which saturates the pages of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation.

After Naomi's husband died and Ruth the Moabitess lost her husband, Ruth chose to follow her mother in law, Naomi, back to Bethlehem (Ruth 1:16). Chapter 2 of Ruth finds Naomi venturing into the grain fields to glean food for her and Naomi. The writer records that Ruth just "**happened to come**" to Boaz's field. From the human perspective, it might appear that Ruth accidentally stumbled onto Boaz's fields, but the Hebrew verb conveys the thought that the event described was beyond human control. It is clear that this divinely orchestrated event was God's providence at work in a most wonderful and mysterious way. The grain fields in Palestine in Ruth's day were not enclosed by fences, but were open fields demarcated by landmarks which were not obvious. In other words, there was no sign saying "This field is property of Boaz." Boaz (whose mother was Rahab the harlot - Mt 1:5) happens to come to his fields the same day and happens to notice Ruth which leads to a face to face meeting and eventually to their marriage and birth of a son name Obed, who would become the grandfather of Jesse, who in turn would become the father of David, whose lineage would one day bring forth "Jesus Christ, the son of David" (Mt 1:1). And so in the providence of God, Ruth the Moabitess is brought into and is specifically included by Matthew as one of the three women named (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth) in the line of the Messiah (Mt 1:5, 6)

The skeptic might ascribe Ruth's sojourn to Bethlehem and to the field of Boaz as mere *coincidence*. But not if God is sovereign and providentially in control of even the number of the hairs on our head or the demise of a sparrow. The English dictionary says that *coincidence* is the occurrence of events that happen at the same time *by accident*, but seem to have some connection. The world describes as mere coincidence the a remarkable concurrence of events or circumstances without an apparent causal connection. As you might surmise, there is not a single use of the word *coincidence* in all of Scripture! Ruth's "happening" did not just happen by accident, by a stroke of good luck, by fate or fortune or by any other term the unbelieving world might ascribe. God providentially ordered her steps.

While providence supports,  
Let saints securely dwell;  
That hand which bears all nature up  
Shall guide His children well.

- Philip Doddridge

In one of the great examples of a man's belief in God's providence, [Mordecai](#) addresses [Queen Esther](#) at a time when evil [Haman](#) had set a course to destroy forever the Jewish people...

For if you remain silent at this time, **relief and deliverance will arise** for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this? (Esther 4:14)

**Comment:** Note that although Mordecai never mentions God's Name, clearly his declaration is a strong indicator of His trust in God's providence. He knows that if the Jews are exterminated, the line of the Messiah will be eradicated and Jesus could never become Man and He would never redeem man from his sin and its wages, eternal death! To be sure, Mordecai may not have fully understood all of God's purpose for His Suffering Servant, but he surely knew God's promise to "Father Abraham" that "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3, cp Ge 13:15 where *descendants* is the Hebrew word *zera* or "*seed*" in the *singular*), a promise which Paul explains refers to and is fulfilled in Christ, the Messiah (Read Galatians 3:16, cp Galatians 3:8). (See [Spurgeon's sermon - Providence—As Seen in the Book of Esther](#))

Many Biblical resources state that providence is the major theme of the Book of Esther, despite the fact that there is never a direct mention of God. And yet as alluded to above, God's providential hand is behind the twists and turns of the story, preserving His chosen people from destruction.

As alluded to above, the doctrine of providence permeates the pages of Scripture, despite the fact that most translations never actually use the word providence! Two New Testament passages that are often quoted as describing God's providence are recorded below...

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to

His purpose. (Ro 8:28-note)

also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will (Eph 1:11-note)

**Webster's 1828** says **providence** is...Foresight; timely care; particularly active foresight or foresight accompanied with the procurement of what is necessary for future use, or with suitable preparation. How many of the troubles and perplexities of life proceed from want of providence! In theology, (**providence is**) the care and superintendence which God exercise over His creatures. He that acknowledges a creation and denies a providence, involves himself in a palpable contradiction; for the same power which caused a thing to exist is necessary to continue its existence. Some persons admit a **general** providence, but deny a **particular** providence, not considering that a general providence consists of particulars.(!) A belief in divine providence, is a source of great consolation to good men. By divine providence is often understood God Himself

## **THE DOCTRINE OF THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD: STRENGTHENING, STABILIZING, TRANQUILIZING**

**A W Pink** wrote that...The providence of God is His care of and provision He makes for His creatures, with His supervision and superintendence of them. The providence of God in His government of the world is a subject of deep importance to the Christian, for by proper views thereof he will learn to see God's activities in the daily works of His hands... Nothing is more **strengthening to faith, stabilizing to the mind, and tranquilizing to the heart** of a Christian, than for him to be enabled to discern his Father's hand guiding, shaping, and controlling everything which enters his life; and not only so, but that He is also governing this world, and all people and events in it... The advantages of a clear grasp of this foundational Truth of Divine providence are many.

**First, it delivers the Christian from being carried away by the tide of public opinion** Few things have a greater tendency to lead Christians into error, than the apparent success of public opinion. People in general judge of a cause by its seeming *success*, and often Christians are greatly influenced by this pernicious principle. Opinions spread by infection, rather than by a thorough investigation of the evidence. But an accurate acquaintance with the ways of Providence, as revealed in Scripture, is calculated to deliver from this prejudice. There we discover that God has often granted much "success" to His enemies, and by it they were hardened in their rebellion. Mere success is no proof of Truth, and lack of success is neither evidence of error nor of God's displeasure.

**Second, a proper acquaintance with the grand truth of Divine Providence, should also be of real help in guarding us against having recourse to artifice and deceit, in the propagation of the Truth.** The Apostle Paul, in spite of all his zeal for the Gospel, disdained all worldly wisdom in his efforts to advance its progress: he commended the Truth to every man's conscience in the sight of God. Then let us stick to the means of God's ordering, and rigorously shun all human inventions. Temptations to compromise, to lower the standard, to bring in fleshly devices so as to "draw the young people," are multiplying today...

**Third, a proper acquaintance with this blessed doctrine of Divine Providence provides consolation amid so much which distresses the godly.** The more a true believer ponders the character of the times in which his lot is cast—the more is his heart saddened. The affairs of this world appear to be completely under the dominion of the Prince of Darkness—but in the grand truth of God's government there is real comfort and solid support for the heart. From it we learn that even the very opposition which is made to the kingdom of Christ, is part of the plan of Divine wisdom, and will be overruled for the glory of God and of His Son. It is true that "The whole world lies in wickedness" (1Jn 5:19), yet not in the sense that God has relinquished its government. The wrath of Satan shall be obliged to praise God, and any device of it which has not that tendency, He will "restrain" and not allow to be manifested. ([Divine Providence](#))

**Walter A Elwell** writes that while **providence** essentially speaks of foresight or making of provision beforehand...

When applied to God the idea takes on a vastly larger dimension because God not only looks ahead and attempts to make provision for his goals, but infallibly accomplishes what he sets out to do. And because it is God's governance that is in view, it encompasses everything in the universe, from the creation of the world to its consummation, inclusive of every aspect of human existence and destiny. Providence, then, is the sovereign, divine superintendence of all things, guiding them toward their divinely predetermined end in a way that is consistent with their created nature, all to the glory and praise of God. This divine, sovereign, and benevolent control of all things by God is the underlying premise of everything that is taught in the Scriptures...

**The Extent of Providence.** Simply put, providence encompasses every aspect of the created order. From beginning to end, from heaven to earth, from animate to inanimate, from individuals to nations, from hours to ages, from weeds to wheat, from birth to death, from catastrophe to calm—everything is within the loving presence and involvement of the heavenly father. In his wisdom, power, righteousness, and love he is hastening slowly to work out his own eternal purposes for his own glory and for our eternal good. Because this is such an all-pervasive theme throughout the Scriptures it is possible only to give a selective, though

representative account of what is taught there...

**God's Involvement in Human Life.** Every aspect of human life is included in God's providential orderings. Just as with the formation, growth, existence, fortunes, and destiny of the world as a whole, the nations of the earth, and Israel in particular, so is it with the individual. God formed us in the womb (Job 10:8-12; Psalm 139:13-14; Jer 1:5), ordained what all lives should be (Ps 139:15-16), guides us in our life's circumstances (Job 5:18; Pr 3:5-6; Acts 18:21; James 4:13-15), meets our temporal needs (Lev 26:4-5; Job 36:31; Matt 5:45; Acts 14:16-17), sends prosperity and adversity (Job 36:11; Isa 45:7; Lam 4:5, 11), and ultimately takes us off this earth in death at his own appointed time (1Sa 2:6, 25; Job 14:5; 2Pe 1:13-14). None of this should cause anxiety. In fact, we are told all of this to encourage and strengthen us in the uncertainties of life. We must remember that it is God our heavenly Father who is ordering our lives. He knows and loves us infinitely; even the hairs of our head are numbered (Matt 10:30). He who clothes the grass and flowers of the field in striking beauty will also take care of us (Matt 6:25-32) and nothing is left to chance. A heavenly Father guides our lives. ([Providence in Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology - Recommended - well-done, thorough article](#))

**Easton's Bible Dictionary** says that

Providence literally means foresight, but is generally used to denote God's preserving and governing all things by means of second causes (Ps. 18:35; 63:8; Acts 17:28; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3). God's providence extends to the natural world (Ps. 104:14; 135:5-7; Acts 14:17), the brute creation (Ps. 104:21-29; Matt. 6:26; 10:29), and the affairs of men (1 Chr. 16:31; Ps. 47:7; Pr. 21:1; Job 12:23; Dan. 2:21; 4:25), and of individuals (1 Sam. 2:6; Ps. 18:30; Luke 1:53; James 4:13-15). It extends also to the free actions of men (Ex. 12:36; 1 Sam. 24:9-15; Ps. 33:14, 15; Pr. 16:1; 19:21; 20:24; 21:1), and things sinful (2 Sam. 16:10; 24:1; Rom. 11:32; Acts 4:27, 28), as well as to their good actions (Phil. 2:13; 4:13; 2 Cor. 12:9, 10; Eph. 2:10; Gal. 5:22-25).

As regards sinful actions of men, they are represented as occurring by God's permission (Gen. 45:5; 50:20. Comp. 1 Sam. 6:6; Ex. 7:13; 14:17; Acts 2:3; 3:18; 4:27, 28), and as controlled (Ps. 76:10) and overruled for good (Gen. 50:20; Acts 3:13). God does not cause or approve of sin, but only limits, restrains, overrules it for good.

The mode of God's providential government is altogether unexplained. We only know that it is a fact that God does govern all his creatures and all their actions; that this government is universal (Ps. 103:17-19), particular (Matt. 10:29-31), efficacious (Ps. 33:11; Job 23:13), embraces events apparently contingent (Pr. 16:9, 33; 19:21; 21:1), is consistent with his own perfection (2 Tim. 2:13), and to his own glory (Ro. 9:17; 11:36).

## THE BEAUTIFUL BENEFICENCE OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

**C H Spurgeon** gives some examples of the divine beneficence of **providence**...

A poor harlot determined she would go and take her life on Blackfriars Bridge. Passing by these doors one Sunday night, she thought she would step in, and for the last time hear something that might prepare her to stand before her Maker. The text was, "*Seest thou this woman?*" (Luke 7:44). I dwelt on Mary Magdalene and her sins, her washing the Savior's feet with her tears, and wiping them with the hair of her head. There stood the woman, melted away with the thought that she should thus hear herself described and her own life painted. Oh, to think of saving a poor harlot from death, and then, as God pleased, to save her soul from going down to hell!

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"Sir," said one to me, "I had been to bargain about a pair of ducks on Sunday morning, and I passed by the door, and I thought I would just look in. There and then the Lord met with me, and those ducks were forgotten, for I found a Savior."

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The good old Puritan met his son. When the young man came in, he said, "Father, I had a very special providence as I rode here today. My horse stumbled three times very badly, yet I was not thrown down." "And I have had an equally special providence in riding here," said the father. "My horse never stumbled all the way, so I was not thrown." - C H Spurgeon

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Our friends need not be troubled by the flying of a dove. It will soon go out of the window, no doubt. Let us believe that it has come as a messenger of good. Oh, that the blessed Dove would his own self come from heaven and bring salvation in his wings! (**Note:** These were Spurgeon's extemporaneous words when he noticed that some in his congregation were nervous about a dove which had flown into the sanctuary.) - C H Spurgeon

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I was engaged to preach last Wednesday at Halifax, where there was a heavy snowstorm. When I arrived, I found from five thousand to six thousand people gathered to hear the Word. We met together in the afternoon and worshiped God, and again in the evening. In front of me there was a huge gallery, capable of holding two thousand persons. In the evening when the people were about to retire, and when there was scarcely more than a hundred persons there, a huge beam gave way, and down came a portion of the flooring of the gallery with a fearful crash. Only two persons were injured with broken legs. Had this happened any earlier, not only must many more have been injured, but a panic must necessarily have ensued similar to that which we remember in this place. Had such a thing occurred, I feel certain that I should never have been able to occupy the pulpit again. But mark another thing. All day long it thawed so fast, that the snow seemed to leave a mass of snow and water together. This ran through the roof on us, to our miserable annoyance, and I was almost ready to complain that we had hard dealing from God's providence. But if it had been a frost instead of a thaw, the place must have fallen several hours before. And then your minister and the greater part of his congregation would probably have been in the other world. - C H Spurgeon

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Everything is in the Divine purpose, and has been ordered by Divine wisdom. All the events of your life- the greater, certainly; and the smaller, with equal certainty. It is impossible to draw a line in Providence and say this is arranged by Providence and that is not. God's Providence takes everything in its sweep- all that happens. Divine Providence determines not only the movement of a star, but the blowing of a grain of dust along the public road.

God's Providence knows nothing of things so little as to be beneath its notice, nothing of things so great as to be beyond its control. Nothing is too little or too great for God to rule and overrule. All that a man undergoes is also ordained of Heaven.

God ordained... when we would be born; where we would be born; who our parents would be; what our lot in infancy would be; what our path in youth would be; and what our position in manhood would be. From the first to the last it has all happened according to the Divine purpose, and ordained by the Divine will.

Not only the man but all that concerns the man, is foreordained of the Lord- "The very hairs of

your head," that is to say, all that has anything to do with you, which comes into any kind of contact with you and is in any sense part and parcel of yourself, is under the Divine foresight and predestination.

You shall neither die before your time, nor live beyond it. All that concerns you, from first to last, all that is of you and in you and around you, is in the Divine purpose. Fate is hard and cruel, but predestination is fatherly and wise and kind. When we see that all things are arranged by Him who orders all things according to the counsel of His own will, then we bow our heads and worship.

Our happiness lies very much in our complete submission to the Lord our God. Oh, it is a blessed thing when we know that God is ordering all the events of Providence. Then we dissolve our own will into the sweetness of His will and our sorrow is at an end!

Since even the very hairs of our head are all numbered; since everything is really ordained by the Most High concerning His people, let us rejoice in the Divine appointment, and take all as it comes, and praise His name, whether our allotment is rough or smooth, bitter or sweet.

Let us cheerfully say, "If the Lord wills it then we will it, too. If He has purposed it, even so let it be, since all things work together for good to those who love God, even to those who are called according to His purpose. (From [The Hairs of Your Head Numbered - C H Spurgeon](#))

**PROVIDENCE**  
(from [Concise Theology](#))  
**J I Packer**

**PROVIDENCE - GOD GOVERNS THIS WORLD**

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD. PROVERBS 16:33

"God's works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions" ([Westminster Shorter Catechism Q.11](#)). If Creation was a unique exercise of divine energy causing the world to be, providence is a continued exercise of that same energy whereby the Creator, according to his own will, (a) keeps all creatures in being, (b) involves himself in all events, and (c) directs all things to their appointed end. The model is of purposive personal management with total "hands-on" control: God is completely in charge of his world. His hand may be hidden, but his rule is absolute.

Some have restricted God's providence to foreknowledge without control, or upholding without intervention, or general oversight without concern for details, but the testimony to providence as formulated above is overwhelming.

The Bible clearly teaches God's providential control

- (1) over the universe at large, Ps. 103:19; Dan. 4:35; Eph. 1:11;
- (2) over the physical world, Job 37; Ps 104:14; 135:6; Matt. 5:45;
- (3) over the brute creation, Ps. 104:21, 28; Matt. 6:26; 10:29;
- (4) over the affairs of nations, Job 12:23; Ps 22:28; 66:7; Acts 17:26;
- (5) over man's birth and lot in life, 1 Sam. 16:1; Ps. 139:16; Isa. 45:5; Gal. 1:15–16;
- (6) over the outward successes and failures of men's lives, Ps. 75:6, 7; Luke 1:52;
- (7) over things seemingly accidental or insignificant, Prov. 16:33; Matt. 10:30;
- (8) in the protection of the righteous, Ps 4:8; 5:12; 63:8; 121:3; Rom. 8:28;
- (9) in supplying the wants of God's people, Gen. 22:8, 14; Deut. 8:3; Phil. 4:19;
- (10) in giving answers to prayer, 1 Sam. 1:19; Isa. 20:5, 6; 2 Chron. 33:13; Ps. 65:2; Matt. 7:7; Luke 18:7, 8; and
- (11) in the exposure and punishment of the wicked, Ps. 7:12–13; 11:6. (See **PROVIDENCE PAGE 180** - [L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology](#), 4th ed.)

Clear thinking about God's involvement in the world-process and in the acts of rational creatures requires complementary sets of statements, thus: a person takes action, or an event is triggered by natural causes, or Satan shows his hand—yet God overrules. This is the message of the book of Esther, where God's name nowhere appears. Again: things that are done contravene God's will of command—yet they fulfill his will of events (Eph. 1:11). Again: humans mean what they do for evil—yet God who overrules uses their actions for good (Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23). Again: humans, under God's overruling, sin—yet God is not the author of sin (James 1:13–17); rather, he is its judge.

The nature of God's "concurrent" or "confluent" involvement in all that occurs in his world, as—without violating the nature of things, the ongoing causal processes, or human free agency—he makes his will of events come to pass, is mystery to us, but the consistent biblical teaching about God's involvement is as stated above.

Of the evils that infect God's world (moral and spiritual perversity, waste of good, and the physical disorders and disruptions of a spoiled cosmos), it can summarily be said: God permits evil (Acts 14:16); he punishes evil with evil (Ps. 81:11–12; Rom. 1:26–32); he brings good out of evil (Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23; 4:27–28; 13:27; 1 Cor. 2:7–8); he uses evil to test and discipline those he loves (Matt. 4:1–11; Heb. 12:4–14); and one day he will redeem his people from the power and presence of evil altogether (Rev. 21:27; 22:14–15).

The doctrine of providence teaches Christians that they are never in the grip of blind forces (fortune, chance, luck, fate); all that happens to them is divinely planned, and each event comes as a new summons to trust, obey, and rejoice, knowing that all is for one's spiritual and eternal good (Rom. 8:28).

## **CONCISE THEOLOGY**

### **A guide to historic Christian beliefs**

#### **J. I PACKER**

##### **Section One: God revealed as Creator**

1. [Revelation - Scripture is the Word of God](#)
2. [Interpretation - Christians can understand the Word of God](#)
3. [General Revelation - God's reality is known to all](#)
4. [Guilt - The effect of general revelation](#)
5. [Inward Witness - Scripture is authenticated by the Holy Spirit](#)
6. [Authority - God governs His people through Scripture](#)
7. [Knowledge - True knowledge of God comes through faith](#)

8. [Creation - God is the Creator](#)
9. [Self-disclosure - This is My Name](#)
10. [Self-existence - God has always been](#)
11. [Transcendence - God's nature is spiritual](#)
12. [Omniscience - God sees and knows](#)
13. [Sovereignty - God reigns](#)
14. [Almightiness - God is omnipresent and omnipotent](#)
15. [Predestination - God has a purpose](#)
16. [Trinity - God is one and three](#)
17. [Holiness - God is light](#)
18. [Goodness - God is love](#)
19. [Wisdom - God's twofold will is one](#)
20. [Mystery - God is surpassingly great](#)
21. [Providence - God governs this world](#)
22. [Miracles - God shows His presence and power](#)
23. [Glory - God's glory-showing requires glory-giving](#)
24. [Idolatry - God demands total allegiance](#)
25. [Angels - God employs supernatural agents](#)
26. [Demons - God has supernatural opponents](#)
27. [Satan - Fallen angels have a leader](#)
28. [Humanness - God made human beings in His image](#)
29. [Humankind - Humans are body and soul, in two genders](#)

## **Section Two: God revealed as Redeemer**

1. [The Fall - The first human couple sinned](#)
2. [Original Sin - depravity infects everyone](#)
3. [Inability - Fallen human beings are both free and enslaved](#)
4. [Covenant - God takes sinful humans into a covenant of grace](#)
5. [Law - God legislates, and demands obedience](#)
6. [Law in Action - God's moral law has three purposes](#)
7. [Conscience - God teaches and cleanses the heart](#)
8. [Worship - God gives a liturgical pattern](#)
9. [Prophets - God sent messengers to declare His will](#)
10. [Incarnation - God sent His Son, to save us](#)
11. [Two Natures - Jesus Christ is fully human](#)
12. [Virgin Birth - Jesus Christ was born by miracle](#)
13. [Teacher - Jesus Christ proclaimed God's kingdom and family](#)
14. [Sinlessness - Jesus Christ was entirely free from sin](#)
15. [Obedience - Jesus Christ fulfilled His Father's redemptive will](#)
16. [Vocation - Jesus Christ's mission revealed at His baptism](#)
17. [Transfiguration - How Jesus Christ's glory was revealed](#)
18. [Resurrection - Jesus Christ was raised from the dead](#)
19. [Ascension - Jesus Christ was taken up into heaven](#)
20. [Session - Jesus Christ reigns in heaven](#)
21. [Mediation - Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and man](#)
22. [Sacrifice - Jesus Christ made atonement for sin](#)
23. [Definite Redemption - Jesus Christ died for God's elect](#)

## **Section Three: God revealed as Lord of Grace**

1. [Paraclete - The Holy Spirit ministers to believers](#)
2. [Salvation - Jesus rescues His people from sin](#)
3. [Election - God chooses His own](#)
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5. [Illumination - The Holy Spirit gives spiritual understanding](#)
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7. [Works - Good works are an expression of faith](#)
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10. [Adoption - God makes His people His children](#)
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20. [The Kingdom of God - Christians must manifest kingdom life](#)
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22. [Church - God plants His people in a new community](#)
23. [Word and Sacrament - How a genuine church is identified](#)
24. [Elders - Pastors must care for the church](#)
25. [Sacraments - Christ instituted two seals of God's covenant](#)
26. [Baptism - This rite exhibits union with Christ](#)
27. [The Lord's Supper - This rite exhibits communion with Christ](#)
28. [Discipline - The church must uphold Christian standards](#)
29. [Mission - Christ sends the church into the world](#)
30. [Spiritual Gifts - The Holy Spirit equips the church](#)
31. [Marriage - Matrimony is meant to be a permanent covenant relationship](#)
32. [The Family - The Christian household is a spiritual unit](#)
33. [The World - Christians are in society to serve and transform it](#)
34. [The State - Christians must respect civil government](#)

#### Section Four: God revealed as Lord of Destiny

1. [Perseverance - God keeps His people safe](#)
2. [Unpardonable Sin - Only impenitence cannot be forgiven](#)
3. [Mortality - Christians need not fear death](#)
4. [Second Coming - Jesus Christ will return to earth in glory](#)
5. [General Resurrection - Dead in Christ will rise in glory](#)
6. [Judgment Seat - God will judge all mankind](#)
7. [Hell - The wicked will be banished into endless misery](#)
8. [Heaven - God will welcome His people into everlasting joy](#)

## Providence in 1 Samuel

See Comments on 1 Samuel 10:2ff

**1. John Bunyan:** was drafted as a soldier in the civil war in England & was sent to take part in the siege of Leicester(Les-ter). As he was about to begin sentry duty 1 night, another requested that they exchange responsibilities. Bunyan agreed. That night the other soldier was shot in the head & died. Bunyan was spared so that in the providence of God he might minister through the written word to generations to come. [wrote greatest allegory of all time, Pilgrim's Progress]

**2. William Cowper:** faced a great crisis. Tired of the struggle, he decided to take his own life, he took an overdose of laudanum[low-dinum](potent narcotic, high morphine concentration) but his suicide attempt failed. Then he tried to drown himself in Thames river, but he was prevented from doing so. The next morning he deliberately tried to impale himself on a knife, but the blade broke & he was only slightly injured. Then he tried to hang himself - & almost succeeded. Someone found him unconscious & cut him down. In despair he began reading Paul's letter to the Romans & received strength to believe that God loved him. [He became one of the most popular poets of the 18th century; Hymn: "There is a Fountain Filled W/Blood"]

**3. Christopher Columbus:** felt greatly disheartened & discouraged after many attempts to obtain financing for a trip to India. While on way back to Italy he stopped 1 day at a convent not far from Granada & asked for a drink of water. The monk who gave him the water heard his story was the man who intervened on his behalf with Queen Isabella. Out of that request for a glass of water came the money to equip the vessels that ultimately crossed the Atlantic - that request led to the discovery of America.

**4. John Calvin:** was also on his way to Italy when he experienced God's control of his path. In Italy he hoped to find freedom from Roman Catholic oppression & leisure to continue his writing. The road was closed because of the war between France & Italy, so he decided to make a detour through Geneva. There he met William Farel(not Will Ferrell), who with fiery eloquence demanded that Calvin stay in Switzerland. Impressed with Farel's earnestness, Calvin complied, & the cause of the Reformation owes much to his decision.

**5. Abraham Lincoln:** one day he was rummaging through a barrel of odds & ends, he came across a copy of Lord Blackstone's Commentaries(on British jurisprudence). This "chance" discovery awakened his interest in law & human rights. As a result he ran for political office & eventually played a decisive role in the history of our country.

**6. George Whitefield:** was employed by his brother in the Bell Inn but could not get along with his brother's wife, so he gave up his job & went to Bristol. Then step by step he went to Oxford, met with the Wesley's, & developed a ministry that touched countless thousands of lives on both sides of the Atlantic. Whitefield was perhaps the greatest preacher of his time.

### **Providence happens!**

A shift change at work; suicides overridden; a glass of water; a road detour; The effect of 1 book; dealing with a tough sister in law, each showing again that God's Sovereignty is evidenced in His remarkable Providence! These seemingly chance contacts & events have literally altered the course of history! How encouraging for each of us to see God's involvement in the seemingly little things in our lives also!

**F.B.Meyer** - All these things, if carefully observed, yield their testimony & assurance that God is in all events permitting, directing, controlling, & causing all things to work out His perfect plan.

**William Blaikie** - The intertwining of events is like "a web of many threads, woven w/ marvelous skill; a network composed of all kinds of materials, great & small, but so arranged that the very smallest of them is as essential as the largest to the completeness of the fabric."

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**PROVIDENCE—Rightly Places us.** Suppose the mole should cry, "How I could have honoured the Creator had I been allowed to fly!" it would be very foolish, for a mole flying would be a most ridiculous object; while a mole fashioning its tunnels and casting up its castles, is viewed with admiring wonder by the naturalist, who perceives its remarkable suitability to its sphere. The fish of the sea might say, "How could I display the wisdom of God if I could sing, or mount a tree, like a bird;" but a dolphin in a tree would be a very grotesque affair, and there would be no wisdom of God to admire in trouts singing in the groves; but when the fish cuts the wave with agile fin, all who have observed it say how wonderfully it is adapted to its habitat, how exactly its every bone is fitted for its mode of life. Brother, it is just so with you. If you begin to say, "I cannot glorify God where I am, and as I am," I answer, neither could you anywhere if not where you are. Providence, which arranged your surroundings, appointed them so that, all things being considered, you are in the position in which you can best display the wisdom and the grace of God.

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### **Question 11 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism:**

**Q:** What are God's works of providence?

**A:** God's works of providence are, his most holy, (Ps. 145:17) wise, (Ps. 104:24, Isa. 28:29) and powerful preserving, (Heb 1:3) and governing all his creatures, and all their actions. (Ps. 103:19, Mt. 10:29-31)

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Believe in a **universal providence**; the Lord cares for ants and angels, for worms and for worlds; he cares for cherubim and for sparrows, for seraphim and for insects. Cast your care on him, he that calls the stars by their names, and leads them out by numbers, by their hosts. 'Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and thinkest O Israel, my way is passed over from God and he has utterly forgotten me?' Let his universal providence cheer you. Think next of his **particular providence** over all the saints. 'Precious shall their blood be in his sight.' 'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.' 'We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.' While he is the Saviour of all men, he is specially the Saviour of them that believe. Let that cheer and comfort you, that special providence which watches over the chosen. 'The angel of the Lord encamps round about them that fear him.'

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**Spurgeon alludes to the mysterious truths of divine providence and freedom of the will** - If you turn to the pages of inspiration, and read the lives of some of the most eminent saints, I think you will be obliged to see **the marks of God's providence** in their histories too plainly to be mistaken. Take, for instance, the life of Joseph. There is a young man who from early life serves God. Read that life till its latest period when he gave commandment concerning his bones, and you cannot help marvelling at **the wondrous dealings of providence**. Did Joseph choose to be hated of his brethren? But, yet, was not their envy a material circumstance in his destiny? Did he choose to be put into the pit? But was not the putting into the pit as necessary to his being made a king in Egypt as Pharaoh's dream? Did Joseph desire to be tempted of his mistress? He chose to reject the temptation, but did he choose the trial? No; God sent it. Did he choose to be put into the dungeon? No. And had he anything to do with the baker's dream, or with Pharaoh's either? Can you not see, all the way through, from first to last, even in the forgetfulness of the butler, who forgot to speak of Joseph till the appointed time came, when Pharaoh should want an interpreter, that there was truly the hand of God? Joseph's brethren did just as they liked when they put him into the pit. Potiphar's wife followed the dictates of her own abandoned lust in tempting him. And yet, notwithstanding all **the freedom of their will**, it was ordained of God, and worked according together for one great end; to place Joseph on the throne; for as he said himself, "Ye meant it for evil, but God intended it for good, that he might save your souls alive!"

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**Pastor Ray Pritchard** records a few of the many benefits of trusting in the doctrine of divine providence...

#### **A. Providence frees us from bitterness.**

This is clearly the message of Genesis 50:20. If ever any man had the right to get even it was Joseph. We get bitter because we doubt God's goodness and we don't see his invisible hand at work in our lives. We think God isn't involved in our situation and that's why we get angry and try to get even and hurt the person who has hurt us. If you really believe God is at work in your situation, you can just stand back and let God do whatever he wants to do.

#### **B. Providence gives us a new perspective on our tragedies.**

That perspective might be stated this way: God is involved with us even in the worst moments of life. I believe that in the great issues of life we will generally not have an answer to the question "Why did this happen to me?" That is, we won't know why our mate got sick or why we lost our life savings or why God didn't intervene when we were being sexually abused. Most of the time we are simply left to wonder why these things happen. Who would dare to say to a woman, "This is why your child was stillborn" or to the grieving people of the church in Nigeria, "This is why Dr. Ologunde died so suddenly"? But it is at this point that God's providence is so crucial. It doesn't tell us everything we would like to know about the mysteries of life, but it does assure us that God is there and that he cares for us. He is somehow involved even in our darkest moments in a way we cannot see—and probably wouldn't understand even if we could see it. Because of God's providence we can keep believing in God even in the face of many unanswered questions. He can bear the burden of all our unanswered questions.

#### **C. Providence gives us courage to keep going in hard times.**

Because God is there, we know that he cares for us, even when life is tumbling in all around us. Last Monday night I was in my study when a man suddenly knocked on my door and came in about 9:15 PM. He was weeping as he sat down. "It's over," he said, "It's over." I knew what he meant. He mentioned that he had been listening to WMBI. Recently they've been playing a song that has kept him going. It contains this seven-word phrase: "Life is hard but God is good." Then he quoted Psalm 115:3, "Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him."

That's what God's providence does for us. It doesn't answer every question, it doesn't make our problems go away, and it doesn't give us an easy road. But it does tell us that there is a pattern to the seemingly random events of life and that God is designing something beautiful out of that which now seems to be only a chaos of clashing colors. Life is hard—make no mistake about that, but God is good. Both those statements are true all the time for all of God's children...

#### **D. Providence forces us to make a choice by faith.**

The older I get the more I understand that faith is a choice, not a feeling. Many times we won't feel like believing in God. But faith is a personal choice we make to believe that God is good and that he can be trusted in every situation. Faith rises above feelings to choose to believe even when our circumstances may argue against it.

#### **E. Providence helps us understand why Jesus died.**

Listen to these amazing words from Acts 2:23, "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross." There you have both sides of the truth. Jesus died "by God's set purpose and foreknowledge." That tells us that the Cross was not an accident or some afterthought in

God's plan. But who crucified him? Remember that Peter is preaching to the men who participated in that evil deed. "You, with the help of wicked men, put him to death." His death was no accident. God foreordained it from the foundation of the world. Yet the men who crucified him were guilty of the most heinous crime in human history. They were morally guilty, but what happened to Jesus happened because of God's divine plan. God's providence leads us to Jesus and Jesus leads us back to the Cross.

He Maketh No Mistake  
by A M Overton

My Father's way may twist and turn,  
My heart may throb and ache  
But in my soul I'm glad I know,  
**He maketh no mistake.**

My cherished plans may go astray,  
My hopes may fade away,  
But still I'll trust my Lord to lead  
For He doth know the way.  
Tho' night be dark and it may seem  
That day will never break,  
I'll pin my faith, my all in Him,  
**He maketh no mistake.**

There's so much now I cannot see,  
My eyesight's far too dim;  
But come what may, I'll simply trust  
And leave it all to Him.  
For by and by the mist will lift  
And plain it all He'll make,  
Through all the way, tho' dark to me,  
**He made not one mistake.**

In the end that will be the testimony of every child of God. Until that morning comes and the sunlight of God's presence fills our faces, we move on through the twilight still believing that though life is hard, God is good. When we finally get to heaven, we'll look back over the pathway of life and see that through all the twists and turns and seeming detours that "He made not one mistake." Until that morning comes and the sunlight of God's presence fills our faces, we move on through the twilight still believing that though life is hard, God is good. And in the end we will say with all the children of God as we look back on our earthly pilgrimage, "He made not one mistake." ([The Invisible Hand Coming to Grips With God's Providence](#))

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**William Graham MacDonald** offers some excellent and interesting **Practical Applications** of the **doctrine of divine providence**...

(1) For some gamblers the need to win—the subconscious desire for providence—is a need greater felt than that for the money itself. Those believers who truly understand the extent to which God has provided for them past, present, and future will not fall into that temptation.

(2) Providence guarantees that there is built into every temptation a way of escape (1Cor 10:13note).

(3) One of the most staggering thoughts you can imagine is this. You will only meet in your lifetime far less than one-hundredth of one percent of all the people in your generation, and you will really get to know by face and name only a much smaller fraction. One has to live with the fact that he will never meet in this life hundreds of millions of interesting people. Providence becomes one's consolation: you will meet certain ones whom God brings across your path (e.g., Ge 14:18-20; 24:15; 29:4-12; Ex 2:5, 6; 1Sa 9:17; 25:23, 24; 1Ki 18:7; Acts 21:16).

(4) The truth of providence takes the chance out of chance for God's people. That is, "The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is wholly from the Lord" (Pr 16:33). The casting of lots was used to single out Jonathan when King Saul's word had been unknowingly violated (1Sa 14:24-5). The infant church, having two equally well-qualified candidates for one important office, affirmed their belief in providence by prayer and the drawing of straws (Acts 1:21-26).

(5) Astrology with its supposed influences on human characters and events is a poor counterfeit for biblical providence.

(6) The eye of faith recognizes God's timely interventions which other eyes fail to see. **Ed:** Lord we believe. Help our unbelief.

Amen [Mk 9:24])

(7) The proper response to providence is thanksgiving to the personal God. Confession of luck denies providence. [Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible Walter A. Elwell Editor. Baker Books](#) or in [Logos](#))

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The **Puritan** writer **Thomas Watson** has the following notes on **providence** writing that...

There is no such thing as chance or blind fate—but there is a providence which guides and governs the world. (see Pr 16:33) **Providence** is God's ordering all outcomes and events of things, after the counsel of his will, to his own glory.

[1] I call providence—God's ordering things, to distinguish it from his decrees. God's decree ordains things that shall happens, God's providence orders them.

[2] I call providence the ordering of things after the counsel of God's will.

[3] God orders all events of things, after the counsel of his will, to his own glory; his glory being the ultimate end of all his actings, and the center where all the lines of providence meet. The providence of God is "the queen and governess of the world." It is the eye which sees, and the hand which turns all the wheels in the universe. God is not like an artificer who builds a house, and then leaves it—but like a pilot, he steers the ship of the whole creation...

God's providence reaches to all places, persons, and affairs... providences, which are casual and accidental to us, are pre-determined by the Lord... providence is greatly to be observed—but we are not to make it the rule of our actions... Divine providence is irresistible... God is to be trusted when his providences seem to run contrary to his promises... The providences of God are chequer-work, they are intermingled... The same action, as it comes from God's providence, may be good; and as it comes from men, may be evil... ADMIRE God's providence... Learn quietly to SUBMIT to divine providence... You who are Christians, believe that all God's providence shall conspire for your good at last... Let it be an antidote against immoderate FEAR, that nothing comes to pass but what is ordained by God's decree, and ordered by his providence... Let the merciful providence of God cause THANKFULNESS... (For more detailed discussion see - [Body of Divinity - Scroll Down to "14. The PROVIDENCE of God"](#))

## Torrey's Topic The Providence of God

SUGGESTION: Observe the following Scripture references on your own to see if you agree with Torrey's analysis and to build up your faith in God's providence (Ro 10:17-note). Consider making you own list of the truths about God's providence in your daily journal. Consider using these Scriptures to lead your Bible study class through a simple inductive Bible study on the providence of God. Remember that one of the great benefits/effects of God's Word of Truth is to sanctify us (John 17:17 = Jesus' prayer for each of us!) , to set us apart from this passing world and unto our unchanging Father, in short, to make us holy as He is holy (See 1Pe 1:13, 14-note, 1Pe 1:15, 16-note and be challenged and motivated by the truth of 1Pe 1:17-note!)

1. Is His care over His works. Ps 145:9.
2. Is exercised in
  - a. Preserving His creatures. Ne 9:6; Ps 36:6; Mt 10:29.
  - b. Providing for His creatures. Ps 104:27,28; 136:25; 147:9; Mt 6:26.
  - c. The special preservation of saints. Ps 37:28; 91:11; Mt 10:30.
  - d. Prospering saints. Ge 24:48,56.
  - e. Protecting saints. Ps 91:4; 140:7.
  - f. Delivering saints. Ps 91:3; Isa 31:5.
  - g. Leading saints. Dt 8:2,15; Isa 31:5.
  - h. Leading saints. Dt 8:2,15; Isa 63:12.

- i. Bringing His words to pass. Nu 26:65; Jos 21:45; Lk 21:32,33.
  - j. Ordering the ways of men. Pr 16:9; 19:21; 20:24.
  - k. Ordaining the conditions and circumstances of men. 1Sa 2:7,8; Ps 75:6,7.
  - l. Determining the period of human life. Ps 31:15; 39:5; Ac 17:26.
  - m. Defeating wicked designs. Ex 15:9-19; 2Sa 17:14,15; Ps 33:10.
  - n. Overruling wicked designs for good. Ge 45:5-7; 50:20; Php 1:12.
  - o. Preserving the course of nature. Ge 8:22; Job 26:10; Ps 104:5-9.
  - p. Directing all events. Jos 7:14; 1Sa 6:7-10,12; Pr 16:33; Isa 44:7; Ac 1:26.
  - q. Ruling the elements. Job 37:9-13; Isa 50:2; Joh 1:4,15; Na 1:4.
  - r. Ordering the minutest matters. Mt 10:29,30; Lk 21:18.
3. Is righteous. Ps 145:17; Da 4:37.
  4. Is ever watchful. Ps 121:4; Isa 27:3.
  5. Is all pervading. Ps 139:1-5.
  6. Sometimes dark and mysterious. Ps 36:6; 73:16; 77:19; Ro 11:33.
  7. All things are ordered by
    - a. For His glory. Isa 63:14.
    - b. For good to saints. Ro 8:28.
  8. The wicked made to promote the designs. Isa 10:5-12; Ac 3:17,18.
  9. To be acknowledged
    - a. In prosperity. Dt 8:18; 1Ch 29:12.
    - b. In adversity. Job 1:21; Ps 119:15.
    - c. In public calamities. Am 3:6.
    - d. In our daily support. Ge 48:15.
    - e. In all things. Pr 3:6.
  10. Cannot be defeated. 1Ki 22:30,34; Pr 21:30.
  11. Man's efforts are vain without. Ps 127:1,2; Pr 21:31.
  12. Saints should
    - a. Trust in. Mt 6:33,34; 10:9,29-31.
    - b. Have full confidence in. Ps 16:8; 139:10.
    - c. Commit their works to. Pr 16:3.
    - d. Encourage themselves. 1Sa 30:6.
    - e. Pray in dependence upon. Ac 12:5.
    - f. Pray to be guided by. Ge 24:12-14; 28:20,21; Ac 1:24.
  13. Result of depending upon. Lk 22:35.
  14. Connected with the use of means. 1Ki 21:19; 22:37,38; Mic 5:2; Lk 2:1-4; Ac 27:22,31,32.
  15. Danger of denying. Isa 10:13-17; Eze 28:2-10; Da 4:29-31; Ho 2:8,9.

Providence is the care of God over created being; divine superintendence. (Johnson)

Providence is the care and superintendence which God exercises over his creatures. (Webster)

Providence is the divine superintendence over all created beings; the care of God over his creatures. (Worcester)

The doctrine of divine Providence is that all things are sustained, directed, and controlled by God. (Leonard Woods)

By the law of providence, I mean God's sovereign disposal of all the concerns of men in this world—in the variety, order, and manner, which he pleases—according to the rule and infinite reason of his own goodness, wisdom, righteousness, and truth. (John Owen)

The word providence is taken from the Latin, and by its etymology means foresight, not merely in the sense of seeing before—but in the sense of taking care for the future, or rather an ordering of things and events after a pre-determined and intelligent plan. It supposes wisdom to devise, and power to execute. (Bethune)

Providence is the superintendence and care which God exercises over creation. (Buck)

Providence is the care which God takes of all things, to uphold them in being and to direct them to the ends which he has determined to accomplish by them, so that nothing takes place in which he is not concerned in a manner worthy of his infinite perfections, and which is not in unison with the counsels of his will. (Dick)

God's conserving all things means his actual operation and government in preserving and continuing the being, powers, dispositions, and motions of all things. (Clarke)

The providence of God is his almighty and everywhere present power, whereby as it were by hand, he upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures; so that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yes, and all things come, not by chance—but by his fatherly hand. (Heidelberg Catechism)

God's works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions. (Westminster Assembly)

According to preceding views and to the Scriptures, God's providence consists—

1. In His preserving all that He has made. He upholds all things by the word of his power. Heb. 1:3. "All eyes look to You, and You give them their food in due time. You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing." Psalm 145:15, 16. This dependence of creatures is universal and perpetual. Could one link in the chain thereof be broken, the least evil that would follow would be annihilation.

2. In governing all that he has made. First, he restrains the creature. By the law of gravitation He keeps solid worlds in their places. By the power of His hand He withholds free agents from both natural and moral evil. Secondly, He guides His creatures. It is His voice that rolls the stars along, and marshals all the stars of heaven, and works wonders among the inhabitants of the earth. Without Him atoms and planets, angels and devils, saints and sinners can do nothing.

"Our God is in heaven and does whatever He pleases!" Psalm 115:3

"For I know that the Lord is great; our Lord is greater than all gods. The Lord does whatever He pleases in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all the depths!" Psalm 135:5-6

"Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns!" Revelation 19:6

## ILLUSTRATIONS & QUOTES ON THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end. (Ecclesiastes 3:14KJV)

And I know that whatever God does is final. Nothing can be added to it or taken from it. God's purpose in this is that people should fear Him. What is happening now has happened before, and what will happen in the future has happened before, because God

makes the same things happen over and over again. (Ecclesiastes 3:14-15NLT)

I know that You can do all things; no plan of Yours can be thwarted. (Job 42:2)

My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do. (Isaiah 46:10-11)

The plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will. (Ephesians 1:11)

This is the plan determined for the whole world. (Isaiah 14:26)

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The boundless stores of **Providence** are engaged for the support of the believer. Christ is our Joseph, who has granaries full of wheat; but He does not treat us as Joseph did the Egyptians, for He opens the door of His storehouse and bids us call all the good therein our own.

He has entailed upon His estate of Providence a perpetual charge of a daily portion for us, and He has promised that one day we shall clearly perceive that the estate itself has been well-farmed on our behalf and has always been ours. The axle of the wheels of the chariot of Providence is Infinite Love, and Gracious Wisdom is the perpetual charioteer. - C H Spurgeon

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The Value of a Firm Belief in Divine Providence - Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition. - Jeremiah Burroughs

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**In every event of Providence, God has a purpose.** The calamities of earthquake, the devastations of storm, the destructions of war, and all the terrible catastrophes of plague, have only been co-workers with God -- slaves compelled to tug the 'galley of the divine purpose' across the sea of time. From every evil, good has come; and the more the evil has accumulated, the more has God glorified himself in bringing out at last his grand, his everlasting design.

God has only one purpose, for all history is but one. There are many scenes, but it is one drama;

there are many pages, but it is one book; there are many leaves, but it is one tree. There are many lords and many rulers, yet is there but one empire, and God the only Potentate.- C H Spurgeon

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Consecration is not the giving over of the calling in life to God, but the separation from all other callings and the giving over of ourselves to God, letting His **providence** place us where He will—in business, or law, or science; in workshop, in politics, or in drudgery. We are to be there working according to the laws and principles of the Kingdom of God. - Oswald Chambers

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The only thing we know about the future is that the **providence of God** will be up before dawn. (Amen or O my!) - Anonymous

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In 1937 Walt Disney released the first full-length animated movie: Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. Producing an animated movie was a gargantuan task. Disney artists drew over one million pictures. Each picture flashed onto the screen for a mere one-twenty-fourth of a second. As we watch the movie run at regular speed, it seems so simple. We have no idea all that goes into it. Our lives are like that movie. God puts infinite thought, skill, and careful attention into every detail. Yet as our lives run at "regular speed," we have no idea how much **God's providence** fills every single second. - Craig Brian Larson - 750 engaging illustrations for preachers, teachers & writers

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One of the most famous documents in American history is the Declaration of Independence. Our forefathers signed that great statement setting forth the reasons they felt God was leading them to establish a new nation upon this continent. Do you remember the closing words?

"For the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of **Divine Providence**, we mutually pledge to each other

our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor.”

O, how America has changed!

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Cliff Barrows has served as Billy Graham’s lifelong associate and crusade song leader. In 1945, before he met Billy Graham, Barrows and his fiancée, Billie, had scraped together enough funds for a simple wedding and two train tickets to a city with a resort hotel. On arrival, however, they found the hotel shut down. Stranded in an unfamiliar city with little money, they thumbed a ride. A sympathetic driver took them to a grocery store owned by a woman he knew. The newlyweds spent their first night in a room above the store. The next day, when the lady overheard Cliff playing Christian songs on his trombone, she arranged for them to spend the rest of their honeymoon at a friend’s house. Several days later the host invited them to attend a youth rally where a young evangelist was speaking. The song leader that night was sick, and Cliff was asked to take charge of the music for the service. The young evangelist, of course, was Billy Graham. The two have been partners ever since. When things don’t go the way you plan, God may have plans for you of his own. - Craig Brian Larson - 750 engaging illustrations for preachers, teachers & writers

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**From a sermon by Ray Stedman** - Many of you remember Wendy Welch, who was here for many years, and the experiences of pain and sorrow that he went through -- how his legs became diseased and had to be amputated, and how, at last, the disease took his life. Just before he died he wrote this testimony, which I read at his funeral:

I asked the Lord to heal me and to make me whole,

But he lamed me to teach me humility.

I asked Him to make me rich,

But he impoverished me to teach me to trust Him.

I asked Him to let me run my life and do His wishes tomorrow,

But he admonished me that there may never be a tomorrow.

I asked Him to let me enjoy the sin of pride in material things,

But he took them away to make me dependent upon Him alone.

He gave me nothing that I asked for, and everything that I wanted.

I have no choice but to trust Him with everything, from now to eternity.

That says it, doesn't it? "He gave me nothing that I asked for, but everything that I wanted." ([Prayer, Providence, Praise](#))

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**Six Degrees Of Separation** - Eighty years ago, Hungarian author Frigyes Karinthy wrote a short story he called “Chain-Links,” in which he proposed the idea that any two individuals in the world are connected through, at most, five acquaintances. The thesis has been revived today and is usually described as “Six Degrees of Separation.” It’s an unproven theory, of course. But there is a dynamic at work that links us to others around the world:

**It is the wisdom and providence of God  
working through His Word to accomplish His will.**

Some years ago, I received a letter from a man whom I had never met telling me that a note I had sent to a nearby friend had found its way to him, and it had encouraged him in a time of weariness and dark despair. The friend to whom I had sent the note sent it to a friend, who, in turn, sent it to a friend, and so on, until it was sent to the man who wrote to me.

It may be that a simple word offered in love, guided by the wisdom of God, and borne aloft on the wings of the Spirit will have eternal consequences in someone’s life.

Should we not then fill ourselves with God’s Word and pass it on to others with the prayer that God will use it for His intended purposes? (Isa. 55:11).— by David H. Roper

Do a deed of simple kindness,  
Though its end you may not see;

It may reach, like widening ripples,  
Down a long eternity.  
—Norris

**As the blossom can't tell what becomes of its fragrance,  
we can't tell what becomes of our influence.**

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**God Incidents** - In the **normal course of providence**, God works in and through creation, not despite it. For this reason, some answers to prayer are difficult to prove with certainty.

"Only faith vouches for the connection," C. S. Lewis writes. "No empirical proof could establish it." We believe a prayer has been answered not because of any scientific criteria proving it, but because we have faith.

Most of the ways we encounter God—nature, the Bible, the Lord's Supper, the church, other people—include things we can touch. God's own state, though, is the realm of spirit. Prayer reflects that difference between us.

Although we may ask God to intervene directly, it should not surprise us if He responds in a more hidden way in cooperation with our own choices. An alcoholic prays, "Lord, keep me from drink today." The answer to that prayer will likely come from the inside—from a stiffening resolve or a cry for help to a loyal friend—rather than from some marvel like the magical disappearance of liquor bottles from a cabinet.

Whether God supernaturally intervenes or is giving us the power to obey Him, we trust His character. We see a true partnership, intimate and intertwined. — by Philip Yancey

Help me to walk aright,  
More by faith, less by sight;  
Lead me with heavenly light—  
Teach me Thy way.  
—Ramsey

**An important part of praying  
is a willingness to be part of the answer**

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**Divine Appointments** - Have you ever been stuck in an airport? For 24 hours? In a city where you can't speak the language? Four thousand miles from home?

It happened to a friend recently, and we can learn from his response. While most of us would find such an inconvenience intolerable, my friend John saw God's hand in his delay. As he waited out his forced stay, he looked for opportunities to connect with fellow passengers. He "**happened**" (**Ed comment:** "*Happen*" from *hap* = luck and means to occur by chance - Providence says absolutely nothing occurs "*by chance*"!) to find some fellow Christians from India—and in talking to them he heard about a ministry they were involved with. In fact, because John's interests matched his new friends' ministry, they invited him to India to participate in a short-term project.

How often do we experience delays, changes of plans, and redirections and treat them as intrusions? It could be that God is detouring us so we can do something different or new for Him. Consider Paul's trip to Philippi in Acts 16. He had gone to Macedonia because of a God-directed vision (Acts 16:9-10). **How could he know that he would end up in prison there?** But even that trip to jail was God-led, because He used Paul to bring salvation to a jailer and his family (Acts 16:25-34, cp Romans 8:28, Genesis 50:20).

God can use inconveniences in our lives if we look at them as divine appointments. — by Dave Branon

"Disappointment—His appointment,"  
Change one letter, then I see  
That the thwarting of my purpose  
Is God's better choice for me.  
—Young

**God can turn obstacles |  
into opportunities.**

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**He Is In Control** - The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord. --Pr 16:33 (**Ed**: Casting lots was a method often used to reveal God's purposes in a matter -- Jos 14:1,2 1Sa 14:38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43 1Chr 25:8-31 Jonah 1:7 Acts 1:26)

Flipping a coin, drawing straws, or taking a number out of a hat have long been ways of resolving disputes. I once read of an election in an Oklahoma town where the two leading candidates each received 140 votes. Rather than go through the expense of another election, city officials used a chance method to decide the winner, and everyone accepted the outcome. What the writer of Proverbs said proved to be true:

Casting lots causes contentions to cease, and keeps the mighty apart (Pr 18:18).

Many people view all of this as nothing more than a matter of chance. But the amazing thing about what the Word of God calls "casting lots" is that the Lord is ultimately the One who controls the outcome. This was true in the story of Jonah, where God showed Himself to be Lord even through the actions of superstitious, unbelieving sailors.

So, what does all of this say to us as believers?

From the Christian's perspective, there is **no such thing as chance**. God is either directly or indirectly involved in **everything** that happens to us. **He can therefore be trusted and obeyed** in any circumstance, because even the smallest details are under His control. --M R De Haan II

Things don't just happen to those who love God,  
They're planned by His own dear hand,  
Then molded and shaped, and timed by His clock;  
Things don't just happen--they're planned.  
--Fields

**God is behind the scenes and  
controls the scenes He is behind.**

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**A Handful Of Thorns** - Jeremy Taylor was a 17th-century English cleric who was severely persecuted for his faith. But though his house was plundered, his family left destitute, and his property confiscated, he continued to count the blessings he could not lose.

He wrote: "They have not taken away my merry countenance, my cheerful spirit, and a good conscience; they have still left me with **the providence of God**, and all His promises ... my hopes of Heaven, and my charity to them, too, and still I sleep and digest, I eat and drink, I read and meditate. And He that hath so many causes of joy, and so great should never choose to sit down upon His little handful of thorns."

Although we may not be afflicted with the grievous difficulties that Jeremy Taylor endured, all of us face trials and troubles. Are we grumbling? Or do we refuse to let our "little handful of thorns," our troubles, obscure the overwhelming abundance of our blessings?

When we feel like complaining, let's remember God's faithfulness and "give thanks to the LORD! Call upon His name; make known His deeds among the peoples!... Remember His marvelous works which He has done!" (Ps. 105:1,5).

When upon life's billows you are tempest-tossed,  
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost;  
Count your many blessings—name them one by one,  
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.  
—Oatman

**Spend your time counting your blessings,  
not airing your complaints.**

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**A MERE HAPPENING?** - Huang, a nonbeliever, was a visiting scientist at the University of Minnesota in 1994. While there, he met some Christians and enjoyed their fellowship. So when they learned he would be returning to Beijing, they gave him the name of a Christian to contact who was also moving there.

On the flight back to Beijing, the plane encountered engine trouble and stopped in Seattle overnight. The airline placed Huang in the same room with the very person he was to contact! Once they arrived in Beijing, the two began meeting weekly for a Bible study, and a year later Huang gave his life to Christ.

**This was not just a mere happening.  
It was by God's arrangement.**

In Ruth 2, we read that Ruth came "to the part of the field belonging to Boaz" (Ru 2:3-note). Boaz asked his servants who she was (Ru 2:5-note), which prompted his special consideration toward her. When Ruth asked him the reason for such kindness, Boaz replied, "It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law ... The Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you" (Ru 2:11, 12-note).

Did the events in the lives of Ruth and Huang just happen? No, for none of God's people can escape God's plans to guide and to provide.

I know who holds the future,  
And I know who holds my hand;  
With God things don't just happen—  
Everything by Him is planned.  
—Smith

**A "mere happening"  
may be God's design.**

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**Naomi** - A wise person once told me, "Never be quick to judge whether something is a blessing or a curse." The story of Naomi reminds me of this.

The name Naomi means "my delight." But when bad things happened to her, Naomi wanted to change her name to match her circumstances. After her husband and sons died, Naomi concluded, "The hand of the Lord has gone out against me!" (Ruth 1:13). When people greeted her, she said, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me" (Ruth 1:20).

Rather than judge her circumstances in light of her identity as a follower of the one true God who had proclaimed unfailing love for His people, Naomi did what most of us tend to do: She judged God in light of her circumstances. And she judged wrongly. The hand of the Lord had not gone out against her. In fact, Naomi had a God-given treasure she had not yet discovered. Although Naomi lost her husband and two sons, she was given something totally unexpected—a devoted daughter-in-law and a grandchild who would be in the lineage of the Messiah.

As Naomi's life shows us, sometimes the worst thing that happens to us can open the door for the best that God has to give us. - Julie Ackerman Link

Loving Father, help me not to judge Your love for me  
on the basis of whether today brings good news  
or bad. Help me remember that You desire to use  
my circumstances to make me more like Jesus. Amen.

**God's purpose for today's events  
may not be seen till tomorrow.**

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In World Vision magazine, John Robb wrote about an occasion when he saw God's perfect timing. Robb was in Moscow to teach a seminar at the week-long Lausanne Soviet Congress on Evangelization. While there he met a man named Mirza who was a doctor from Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan is a Muslim region where there were only twenty known converts to Christ. Robb had an opportunity to tell Mirza about Jesus Christ and he wanted to give him some Christian literature. To Robb's dismay he found he had already given away all the Bibles he had brought, but he had one gospel tract left. Robb writes:

[Mirza] showed up again the next day at my hotel room just as I was leaving for the airport. He expressed his appreciation for my friendship, saying that he hoped we could meet again. I thought, Lord, what I'd give for a Russian New Testament right now. Not ten

seconds later there was a knock at the door. The Russian Gideons were there with a whole load of New Testaments. They had just received permission from the hotel management to place Bibles in every room! One of them held out a New Testament, as if to say, "Is this what you wanted?" I handed it to Mirza and we said goodbye.

God obviously had a purpose for Mirza. And when God is at work, there are no coincidences. - Craig Brian Larson - 750 engaging illustrations for preachers, teachers & writers

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The Rev. [John G. Paton](#), a missionary in the New Hebrides Islands, told a story involving the protective care of angels. Hostile natives surrounded his mission headquarters one night, intent on burning out the Patons and killing them. John Paton and his wife prayed all during that terror-filled night that God would deliver them. When daylight came they were amazed to see the attackers unaccountably leave. A year later, the chief of the tribe was converted to Christ, and Paton, remembering what had happened, asked the chief what had kept him and his men from burning down the house and killing them. The chief replied in surprise, "Who were all those men you had there with you." The missionary answered, "There were no men there; just my wife and I." The chief argued that they had seen many men standing guard hundreds of big men in shining garments with drawn swords in their hands. They seemed to circle the mission station, so the natives were afraid to attack. Only then did the Rev. Paton realize that God had sent his angels to protect them.

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Mr. Spurgeon once had a singular experience. He had been out in the country to preach, and, when traveling back to London, suddenly found that he had lost his railway ticket. A gentleman, the only other occupant of the compartment, noticing that he was fumbling about in his pocket, said, "I hope you have not lost anything, sir?" Mr. Spurgeon thanked him, and told him that he had lost his ticket, and that by a remarkable coincidence he had neither watch nor money with him. "But," added Mr. Spurgeon, "I am not at all troubled, for I have been on my Master's business, and I am quite sure all will be well. I have had so many interpositions of Divine Providence, in small matters as well as great ones, that I feel as if, whatever happens to me, I am bound to fall on my feet ... " The gentleman seemed interested, and said that no doubt all would be right. When the ticket collector came to the compartment, the collector touched his hat to Mr. Spurgeon's companion, who simply said, "All right, William," whereupon the man again saluted and retired. After he had gone Mr. Spurgeon said to the gentleman, "It is very strange that the collector did not ask for my ticket." "No, Mr. Spurgeon," he replied, using his name for the first time, "it is only another illustration of what you told me about the Providence of God watching over you, even in small matters; I am the general manager of the line, and it was no doubt divinely arranged that I should be your companion just when I could be of service to you."

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PROVIDENCE is the hand of God in the glove of history. It is the work of God whereby He integrates and blends events in the universe in order to fulfill His original design for which it was created. It is God sitting behind the steering wheel of time. Providence refers to God's governance of all events so as to direct them toward an end. It is God taking what you and I would call luck, chance, mistakes, happenstance and stitching them into achieving His program. (Tony Evans' book of illustrations: stories, quotes, and anecdotes from more than 30 years of preaching and public speaking)

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God has His hours and His delays. - Johann. A. Bengel

(Providence is) that continued exercise of the divine energy, whereby the Creator preserves all His creatures, is operative in all that comes to pass in the world, and directs all things to their appointed end. - Louis Berkhof

God's providence will fulfill all His promises. - John Blanchard

Providences are long chains with many links in them. If one link were missing, the event would fail. But it is God's chain and God's plan. The thing is fixed. The outcome is not doubtful- William S. Plumer

I have lived, seen God's hand through a lifetime, and all was for best. - Robert Browning

Providence means not that by which God idly observes from heaven what takes place on earth, but that by which, as keeper of the keys, He governs all events. - John Calvin

The mystery of providence defies our attempt to tame it by reason. I do not mean it is illogical; I mean that we do not know enough about it to be able to unpack it. ([See preceding illustration](#)) -D. A. Carson

Happy the man who sees a God employed in all the good and ill that chequers (diversifies) life. -[William Cowper](#)

What God intends, He decrees; what God permits, He has foreseen. - Arthur C. Custance

The longer I live, the more faith I have in providence, and the less faith in my interpretation of providence. - Jeremiah Day

He that will watch providences will never want providences to watch. - John Flavel

Providence has ordered that condition for you which is best for your eternal good. If you had more of the world than you have, your heads and hearts might not be able to manage it to your advantage. - John Flavel

Sometimes providences, like Hebrew letters, must be read backwards. - John Flavel

The longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, that God governs in the affairs of man; and if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid? - Benjamin Franklin (**Ed**: This is an interesting comment, because by all reports Franklin believed in [Deism](#) which denied God's providence by asserting that He created the world, but He was no longer actively involved in it).

Providence is "God's faithful and effective care and guidance of everything which He has made toward the end which He has chosen." - Kenneth Gangel,

God's providence is like the Hebrew Bible; we must begin at the end and read backward in order to understand it. - A. J. Gordon

Either directly or indirectly, every providence has a tendency to the spiritual good of those who love God. - Matthew Henry

God's providences often seem to contradict His purposes, even when they are serving them. - Matthew Henry

What is corrupt, though of God's permitting, is not of his planting. - Matthew Henry

Nothing is or can be accidental with God. - Henry W. Longfellow

Our Lord God doeth work like a printer, who setteth the letters backwards; we see and feel well His setting, but we shall see the print yonder—in the life to come. - Martin Luther

Our spirits are most satisfied when we discern God's aim in everything. - Thomas Manton

God not only orders our steps; he orders our stops. - George Muller

If our circumstances find us in God, we shall find God in our circumstances. - George Muller

The doctrine of providence tells us that the world and our lives are not ruled by fate but by God, who lays bare His purposes of providence in the incarnation of His Son. - T. H. L. Parker

We who are bereaved by the death of our father will find no "solid relief" unless we acknowledge that what has occurred is a result "not of chance, nor of some fatal necessity of nature, nor of the interplay of the elements or parts of the human condition"; it is rather "an event indispensable, inevitable, just, holy, and useful for the well-being of the Church and for the exaltation of the name and of the glory of God, an intervention of Providence decreed from all eternity to take place in the fulness of time, in such a manner." What is left for us is "to unite our will to that of God himself, to will in Him, with Him, and for Him the thing that He has eternally willed in us and for us." - Blaise Pascal, mathematician and Christian philosopher on the death of his beloved father. (Hughes comments: Pascal thus took comfort in two things: first, that the very year, day, hour, place, and manner of his father's death was a providence lovingly decreed by God from all eternity; and second, he took comfort to his heart as he aligned his will to what God had eternally willed for his father. In doing this, Pascal displayed a profoundly biblical perspective about death and life.)

God's providences are but the manifestations of His decrees. What God does in time is only what He purposed in eternity. - Arthur Pink

God rules and overrules. - William S. Plumer

There's a Divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will. - William Shakespeare

Follow the guide of divine providence and precept, lead it wherever it may. - C H Spurgeon

Goodness is providence in embryo; providence is goodness fully developed. Goodness is the bud of which providence is the flower; or goodness is the seed of which providence is the harvest. - C H Spurgeon

God's providence and purposes lie behind everything that occurs, but still God Himself is not the author of any sinful action. - Geoff Thomas

I do not know why God does some things, but I am convinced that nothing is accidental in His universe. - A. W. Tozer

God is to be trusted when his providences seem to run contrary to his promises. - Thomas Watson (To be sure, to recognize and accept the hand of God in our multicolored circumstances requires the exercise of faith.) Watson adds that "It is a sin as much to quarrel with God's providence as to deny his providence." B B Warfield adds that "A firm faith in the universal providence of God is the solution of all earthly problems. It is almost equally true that a clear and full apprehension of the universal providence of God is the solution of most theological problems."

**C H Spurgeon** - How sweet is providence to a child of God, when he can reflect upon it! He can look out into this world, and say, "However great my troubles, they are not so great as my Father's power; however difficult may be my circumstances, yet all things around me are working together for good. He who holds up the starry heavens can also support my soul without a single apparent prop; he who guides the stars in their well-ordered courses, even when they seem to move in mazy dances, surely he can overrule my trials in such a way that out of confusion he will bring order; and from seeming evil produce lasting good. He who bridles the storm, and puts the bit in the mouth of the tempest, surely he can restrain my trial, and keep my sorrows in subjection. I need not fear while the lightnings are in his hands, and the thunders sleep within his lips; while the oceans gurgle from his fist, and the clouds are in the hollow of his hands; while the rivers are turned by his foot, and while he digs the channels of the sea. Surely he whose might wings an angel, can furnish a worm with strength; he who guides a cherub will not be overcome by the trials of a worm like myself. He who makes the greatest star roll in dignity, and keeps its predestined orbit, can make a little atom like myself move in my proper course, and conduct me as he pleases." Christian! There is no sweeter pillow than providence; and when providence seems adverse, believe it still, lay it under your head, for depend upon it there is comfort in its bosom. There is hope for you, child of God!

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From the **Valley of Vision** (Puritan Prayers) here are a few excerpts that make a reference to Divine Providence...

**All-wise God,**

**Thy never-failing providence orders every event,**

sweetens every fear,

reveals evil's presence lurking in seeming good,

brings real good out of seeming evil,

makes unsatisfactory what I set my heart upon,

to show me what a short-sighted creature I am,

and to teach me to live by faith upon

thy blessed self.

Grant me the favor of being led by Thee,

under the directions of Thy **providence**

and Thy Word.

I believe in Thee as the God of nature,

the Ordainer of **providence**,

the Sender of Jesus my Saviour.

## RESOURCES RELATED TO THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

- [Multiple Resources on Providence from Gracegems](#)- Recommended
- [Jehovah- Jireh: A Treatise on Providence](#) - by William S. Plumer, 1865 (Related Resource: Jehovah Jireh: The LORD Will Provide)
- Below are the topics Plumer addresses in this treatise...
  - [Providence Asserted](#)

- [God's Providence Results from His Nature](#)
- [God's Providence is Universal](#)
- [Practical Remarks on the Nature of Providence](#)
- [God's Providence is Retributive](#)
- [Delays of Providence in Punishing the Wicked](#)
- [Doctrine of Providence over Wicked Men](#)
- [The Mysteries of God's Providence](#)
- [Practical Remarks on the Mysteries of God's Providence](#)
- [The Special Kindness of Providence Towards Godly Men](#)
- [Practical Remarks on the Special Kindness of Providence Towards Godly Men](#)
- [Alternate Light and Darkness in Providence Illustrated in the Case of Job](#)
- [God's Providence Towards His Church](#)
- [God's Providence over Nations](#)
- [Providence Punishes Nations for Their Sins](#)
- [Providence by Walter A Elwell - Well-done, thorough article by respected theologian](#)
- [Providence by William Arnot from studies in Proverbs-"Laws from heaven for life on earth"](#)
- [The Providence of God by Don Fortner](#) - Succinct, to the point discussion
- [Divine Providence by Arthur Pink](#) - Some practical thoughts on providence
- [Providence \(part 1\) Providence \(part 2\) by Wilbur Tillett](#) - In depth discussion
- [God's Providential Care - study based on Ruth 2 - Susie Hawkins](#)
- [How Much Does God Control?](#) - 32 page booklet from Discovery Publishing - sound Biblical summary
- [Joseph and the Providence of God](#) - Audio by Ray Pritchard (He is always worth hearing or reading)
- [The Invisible Hand: Coming to Grips with God's Providence](#) - Transcript by Ray Pritchard
- [Providence—As Seen in the Book of Esther](#) - Sermon by C H Spurgeon
- [God's Providence](#)- Sermon on Ezekiel 1:15-19 by C H Spurgeon
- [A Promise and a Providence](#)- Sermon on Ezekiel 34:15 by C H Spurgeon
- [Providence](#) - Sermon on Matthew 10:30 by C H Spurgeon
- Study of Ruth 2:3 - "She happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz"
- [Ruth 2:3 Seeming Chances, Real Providences](#)- from Preacher's Homiletical Commentary
- [Prayer, Providence, Praise](#) - Sermon on Romans 8 by Ray Stedman
- [God's Providential Protection - sermon on Acts 23:12-35](#) - Sermon by Steven Cole
- [Communion in God's Providence](#) - Sermon on Luke 1:39-45 by J. Ligon Duncan
- [Jesus Controls the Physical Universe](#)- Sermon on Mt 8:18-27 by J. Ligon Duncan
- [God Moves in a Mysterious Way](#) - discussion of Cowper's hymn by J. Ligon Duncan, et al
- [God Moves in a Mysterious Way](#) - sermon by Sinclair Ferguson
- [Providence of God sermons](#) - Gospel Coalition (speakers like Mark Dever, etc) Mainly Audio
- [The Mystery of Providence - Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#) by John Flavel compiled by Andy Davis
- [The Doctrine of Providence](#) - by Wayne Grudem - 33 page article