

# The Providence of God

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[ 0 : 00 ] Last Wednesday night we did a study that helps us see why most people in this world are religious and have at least a basic understanding of right and wrong. We looked at God's common grace and His natural law.

Well, tonight I want to sort of continue that line of thinking by looking at how God is at work in every aspect of this universe.

He's always at work in everything. Theologians call this God's providence.

I've given you on the outline a condensed version of last week's handout. Look briefly at the major points. If you are interested and you weren't here last week, you can read it when you get home.

If you looked at God's common grace and natural law, common grace is the idea that God demonstrates His grace toward all people on a regular basis. Jesus talked about it, so did Paul.

[ 1 : 06 ] Timothy Keller has a good explanation about it. Natural law. God has revealed Himself and His law in a general way to all people. He's written it on our hearts.

It's a part of being created in the image of God. And Paul writes about it there in Romans chapter 2. He also talks about in Romans 1 how God has revealed Himself to everybody through nature, through what He's created.

And God considers His revelation enough to make people aware enough about Him that when they reject what He has revealed about Himself, all people are guilty of sin.

They're without excuse. Wayne Grudem explains this a good way there. But we looked at that in detail last week and that's not for tonight. Let's look at Roman numeral 2 now.

God's continuing work in His creation, the doctrine of providence. I want to define it by looking at two things. Millard Erickson. Erickson is a Baptist theologian.

[ 2 : 21 ] He is probably the second most read, or his Christian theology is second most used in Southern Baptist seminaries. Wayne Grudem is number one.

But Erickson is very respected. He writes, While creation is God's originating work with respect to the universe, providence is God's continuing relationship to His creation.

By providence, we mean the continuing action of God by which He preserves in existence the creation He's brought into being, and He guides it to His intended purpose for it.

The Bible teaches that God created everything. And the Bible teaches that God didn't just create this world. He didn't just create it and wind it up and let it go.

God has continued since the day of creation to be involved in guiding everything now in this fallen sinful world according to His intended purpose.

[ 3 : 30 ] He is God. He's in control. The abstract of principles, that is still a governing document at Southern Seminary.

Teaching on the faculty there. You've got to sign that along with Baptist faith and message. It is the earliest written statement of faith of Southern Baptists.

Now Baptist 1689 wrote the second London Baptist.

I remember that date. I don't remember when the first one was. Baptists have been writing statement of faith since Baptists have been in existence. But the first one, Southern Baptist Convention was started in 1845.

The first statement of faith that was written by a Southern Baptist. It was the abstract of principles.

[ 4 : 32 ] And they have a section on God's providence. Look at it. God from eternity decrees or permits all things that come to pass and perpetually upholds, directs, and governs all creatures and all events, yet so as not in any wise to be the author or approver of sin, nor to destroy the free will and responsibility of intelligent creatures.

God's in control. But when you and I do sinful things and stupid things, we can't blame God.

But even in the midst of our sin and stupidity, He's still in control. And He can work in it, through it, around it to accomplish what He wants to accomplish in this world and in our lives.

The idea of God's providence means that nothing happens by chance. There are no accidents. I saw one smart aleck one time make a statement like that, and then he stumbled and fell, got up and said, I'm glad that's over.

The outcome of things like rolling dice, flipping coins, are ordered by God and stated there, you see, in His Word.

[ 6 : 08 ] The lot is cast into the lap, but it's every decision is from the Lord. And there's a lot of places in the Old Testament where God's people and pagans like in the book of Jonah, which is a lot of places where God's people, they so trusted that God was in charge.

Another way to describe this, they so trusted in God's sovereignty, that He was in control, that they cast the lot, cast the die, with the trust that God would make it what He wanted it to be.

It's just a matter of information. When is the last time believers cast lots in the Bible?

Huh? That's right. In Acts chapter 1, they chose Judas' replacement by the casting of a lot.

And that was it. Now, we can do a study on that sometime, but from that point on, after that, the Holy Spirit came to indwell all Christians.

[ 7 : 36 ] And from that point on, as you read through the New Testament, the apostles, they made decisions based on prayer, their knowledge of God's Word, and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

They made decisions based on their God-given wisdom. And when you see churches making decisions, that's what they did.

And then we're casting a lot. That's why we don't do that. Now, there's nothing wrong with, you know, if, you know, if I've got \$5, and I think, I either ought to give it to Tommy or Millage, which one should I give it to?

Flip a coin. I don't see anything wrong with that. Do you? We can do that. But the idea is, God is in control to the minutest detail, even in the flip of a coin.

The lot is cast into the lap, but it's every decision is from the Lord. And Paul said that God works all things according to the counsel of His will.

[ 8 : 56 ] I mean, the Bible is just real clear God's in charge. God's providence is sometimes described in terms of God's sovereignty.

It's really hard, or at least it is hard for me, to distinguish between a definition of God's providence and the definition of God's sovereignty.

I don't know if I was trying to get everything on two pages. Wayne Grudem defines God's sovereignty as God's exercise of power over His creation.

Very similar. Very similar. In fact, if you read, if you ever do a study of God's providence, whoever's writing, whoever's trying to explain it, whoever brings out Scripture, they're going to bring in that word sovereignty to explain it as well.

And here's some good examples of how the Bible is filled with statements about God's power, God's authority, God's sovereignty.

[ 10 : 07 ] Job said to God, I know that you can do all things. No plan of yours can be thwarted. The Lord does whatever pleases Him in the heavens and on earth, in the seas, in all their depths.

It's everywhere. And in Isaiah, I say, the Lord says, my purpose will stand and I will do all that I please.

What I want us to see in this, this is helpful to us. If we are truly Christians and we believe that God is who He's revealed Himself to be in His Word, we really believe that the Bible is God's inerrant Word, this should be comforting to us.

This should assure us that God is in control. Miller Derrickson says something along this line, providence is in certain ways central to the conduct of the Christian life, central to how we live our lives.

It means that we are able to live in the assurance that God is present and active in our lives. We are in His care and He can, and can therefore face the future confidently knowing that things are not happening merely by chance.

[ 11 : 31 ] We can pray knowing that God hears and acts upon our prayers. We can face danger knowing that He is not unaware and uninvolved. But here's the rub here.

God is sovereign. God's in control. But everything doesn't happen in our lives like we want it to. Everything that happens to us and around us is not just, is not right, is not good.

There are Christians probably, I don't have any idea, but there's probably Christians who are grieving the death of their loved one in El Paso or Dayton, Ohio.

God's sovereignty doesn't take away the pain. It does not in any way lessen the loss, the grief that your child, your spouse, your parent, your friend has died a senseless death.

So here's where we've got to really trust it. God knows what He's doing. We wish that wasn't what He allowed.

[13:03] but He did. Romans 8, 28 is one of the most, one of the best one verse statement of God's providence. And I think it helps just to know and we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him who have been called according to His purpose.

not that everything is good but He is working for ultimate good. The story of Joseph is the best example of that. It's one of the best examples of God's providence or God's sovereign power that you have in all the Bible.

I want us to look just, you know, sort of in a general way. I'm assuming that everybody here is familiar with the story of Joseph. Joseph. You should be.

Genesis 37 through 50 tells it. Let's look at some highlights. Number one, God works through sin to accomplish His purpose.

God is not the author of sin but He does work through it. God doesn't cause sin but He does work through it. God works through the sinful choices of people to do His will.

[14:25] As Job said, sin cannot or nothing can thwart the purposes of God. Sin cannot thwart the purposes of God. Think about the sinful choices of Joseph's brothers.

They hated their brother. They were jealous of their brother and nobody made them be that way. They couldn't stand the fact that their father favored Joseph.

I think that's a flaw in the parent and Joseph probably shouldn't have said all he said about his dreams. He might have fanned the flames a little bit himself but they chose to hate him, to be jealous of him.

They wanted to kill him remember. But one of the brothers, one of the brothers intervened and led them to sell him into slavery.

God allowed that to happen and we don't always see it but we see it, look at it on the scripture there. God used it for a great purpose. As for you, this is what Joseph said to his brothers, as for you, you meant evil against me but God meant it for good to bring it about that many people should be kept alive as they are today.

[15:56] And that was God's way of saving the nation of Israel from starvation back where they lived. That was God's way of preserving his chosen people and the Savior who came from them.

Number two, God works through suffering to accomplish his purpose. Joseph suffered for years at the hands of his brother, Potiphar's wife and the cup bearer who forgot about him, resulting in Joseph staying longer in prison.

But you have to take your hat off to Joseph. Through it all, he knew that the Lord had a purpose for this. He knew that the Lord was with him and he remained faithful.

Look at these examples from Scripture. The Lord was with Joseph and he became a successful man and he was in the house of his Egyptian master.

at the end of that chapter. But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

[17:13] This is God's providence. God worked through the sinful actions of Joseph's brothers to put Joseph in Egypt.

God took care of Joseph in Potiphar's house after he was wrongly accused by Potiphar's wife. God took care of Joseph in prison and then eventually elevated him.

The next one here, God worked through success to accomplish his purpose. When Joseph became second in command over all Egypt, the Lord used that, that success for good.

Look at this in Genesis 41. Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, since God has shown you all this, interpreting the dream, there is none so discerning and wise as you are.

You shall be over my house and all my people shall order themselves as you command, only as regards the throne, will I be greater than you.

[18:27] God worked through the sin and the suffering to make him successful and provide a place for his family to come and then to say to them, there's that passage again, we read a moment ago, as for you, you brothers, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good to bring about

that many people should be kept alive as they are today.

Now, let's think about it. The providential workings of God or the sovereign work of God, if you want to think about it that way, should help us to trust that God is involved in the world.

He's involved in this country. He's involved in our lives. God's life is for an ultimately good purpose. The world's not going to last forever. It's going to come to an end. The United States may not last forever. It may not last, it may not be anything like the next 50 years as it has been the last 50 years.

We're not going to live in this world forever. God is at work, but we don't know how he's at work. It's wrong for us as Christians to think, well, God's going to work in this mess of a country that we're in right now and everything's going to turn out well.

[ 19 : 58 ] It may not. We may implode and never not exist 50 years from now, 100 years from now. We don't know, but God is at work.

In times of crisis, we don't usually understand what God is doing as he works. We don't usually understand how he's involved, what he's doing, why he's doing it.

That's where faith comes in. And we're not talking about blind faith, faith and faith. We're talking about faith in God who is good and who is in control and who has a plan that he's working out in this world that will ultimately lead to his glory and his people's eternal blessings.

More often than not, we have to look back over time to see how God has been at work. That's what Joseph had to do. He didn't see, he didn't understand all that in the middle, but he could look back and see it.

That's what he said in chapter 50 verse 20. But we'll never understand everything. Why God allowed someone's sinful choices to cause us or somebody we love to suffer?

[ 21 : 27 ] We may not ever understand that. We may never know that. But there's nothing wrong with asking why. Some people say, it's wrong to question God.

It's wrong to question if God knows what he's doing. It's wrong to question if God is good. But it's not wrong to question and say, why? The psalmist does. Because, you know, between you and God, between me and God, we all in here may be honest.

And we just talk to him and tell him what we struggle with. But we don't do a whole lot of that in front of one another.

Do we? We keep that pretty close. Talk about everything being great when it's not. Well, the psalmist, he wrote this. And a lot of the psalms are written by David King.

Look at this, just two examples. Why, O Lord, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? And then the other one.

[ 22 : 39 ] How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? Me? Some people just get mad at God because he doesn't do what they, because he doesn't do what they want them to do.

What, yeah, what they want him to do. Or they just ignore him. Psalmist is just being honest. He feels distant from God. And he's talking to God.

You ever ask, you ever been ticked off or your spouse ticked off at you and they ever ask you, when are you going to talk to me again?

Or you may like it and hope they never talk to you again. You know, some, who's according to who you're married to. How long are you going to be mad? You might ask somebody, how long are you going to be mad? How long are you going to be mean to me?

How long are you going to cook what I want you to cook? How long before you fry another chicken? At least you're communicating, right? The psalm, what I want you to see is the psalmist is communicating.

[ 23 : 52 ] It's okay to tell God what you think because he already knows it. And if you think bad, you know what I think? God, I just think Jeff's a jerk.

Lord, I know that's wrong to think that. So help me not to think that. That's a decent prayer. If you think that, the psalmist does stuff like that.

And those are models for how we should pray. The Bible speaks very little about why everything works the way it does.

As someone pointed out, God is not in the habit of explaining, but he is in the habit of sustaining. And that's what a lot of times he's just going to do.

Just get us through. And when going back to the tragedies, if it's your loved one, friend who dies in any kind of tragedy, even if God told you why, it wouldn't help.

[ 25 : 06 ] They'd still be gone. Your heart would still be broken. And so God is going to mainly sustain us. Give us what we need for the hour, the day, the week, the month.

But we can trust that there is a reason. And we may not ever know it. Or we may not ever know it this side of heaven. We may not know it just une darüber before the