

## Divine Providence

(outlined from *Understanding the Providence of God*  
by Earl R. Borders; used with permission)

- **Questions to Consider**
  - What is "divine providence"?
  - Are there examples that could help me understand?
  - How does it apply to my life? (Look at the bottom of handout – "be changed by it")
  - Discuss:
    - fear about the future
    - fear about not being in control of my life
    - fear about bad things happening to me
    - song: "There's peace in knowing, Lord, You're in control"
    - Christian's life motto: Nothing just happens
    - have you ever looked back at a situation and thought, "That was God"?
      - that's one way of looking at "Divine Providence"
- **What Is Divine Providence?**
  - some common beliefs concerning God and the universe:
    - happened by chance (evolution)
    - created by a distant (benevolent) God
      - whatever happens, happens
    - created by a controlling God
      - man has no choice, all (including people) are on a predetermined path
    - created by a changing God
      - man's choice can change God's will
    - are any of these true?
  - **Definitions**
    - **"divine"** – the nature of God; relating to God
    - **"providence"** – foresight, forethought, predetermined, to consider in advance, a preparation for the future, purposed
  - **God's Will and Purpose**
    - **Ephesians 1:9** – "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself."
      - God's "will" was "purposed in himself"
        - "purposed" – means "to set before"
      - **Ephesians 1:9 AMP** – God's "will (of His plan, His purpose)" was "previously purposed and set forth in Him" (Jesus)
      - "made known to us" – Because God has a personal interest in each of us, He has a plan (will, intention, purpose) for our lives
    - **Ephesians 1:11** – He is working "all things after the counsel of his own will"
      - God has a providential (well thought out) PLAN that He is carrying out
    - **Does that mean we have no control?**
      - humans have a free will
        - Deuteronomy 30:19 – "I set before you life and death"
        - Joshua 24:15 – "choose you this day"
      - God has "his own will" that He wants to work in our lives
        - personal will

- divine plan
- what happens when these are opposite?
  - Saul's will – persecuting the church "daily"
    - Acts 26:14 – "it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks [goads]."
      - AMP "pointless resistance"
    - God did not force Saul to be saved (Saul's personal will), but He prevented Saul from completely destroying the Christians (against the divine plan)
      - However, God used Saul's persecution to help spread the Gospel
  - Ephesians 1:1 – "Paul, an apostle ... by the will of God"
    - Galatians 1:15-16 – confirms that God had this plan before Paul was born
    - not Paul's will previously
    - Paul (Saul) could have accepted or reject God's plan
- Jeremiah – "before I formed thee in the belly ... I ordained thee a prophet" (Jeremiah 1:5)
  - Jeremiah could have refused, others could have tried to stop him, but this was God's PERFECT will
- God does not force us to do His will
  - that would make us no different than the animals (doing exactly what they were created to do)
- God does not allow man to overrule His plan
  - God's will (purpose, intention) will not be changed
  - 2 Corinthians 13:8 – "For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth."
- Deuteronomy 29:29 – "The secret things belong unto the Lord ... but those things which are revealed belong unto us"
- **God Is All-Knowing (Omniscient) and in Control (Omnipotent)**
  - Isaiah 46:10 – "declaring the end from the beginning"
    - only God has that knowledge
  - Isaiah 46:9 – "I am God, and ... there is none like me"
  - Ephesians 1:4 – "before the foundation of the world"
    - God's plan was put in place before He created this world (eternity past)
    - For example: 1 Peter 1:18-20 – Christ's Crucifixion was "foreordained before the foundation of the world"
  - Revelation 19:6 – "the Lord God omnipotent reigneth"
    - nothing catches God off guard
    - He is in full control
  - Note: we are creatures of choice; people are not predestined for Heaven or hell
    - the PLAN was "foreordained" (or predestined), not people
- **God Has a "Counsel"**
  - Psalm 33:11 – "The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations."
    - Note: parallelism – "counsel of the LORD" is "the thoughts of his hearts"
    - counsel = God's purpose, intention
    - it will not be changed – "standeth for ever"
  - Isaiah 46:10 – "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."
    - "I will do all things that I have planned" (The Septuagint)
  - Ephesians 1:11 – "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will"
    - "worketh" – not worked; present tense

- Isaiah 55:8-9 – "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways"
- **When We Pray Out of God's Will**
  - 1 John 5:14-15 – "if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he heareth us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him."
    - If we just look at the last part of that verse, it seems like God will answer ALL our prayers
    - Notice: God answers every prayer that He hears
    - Are there prayers that God does not "hear"?
      - word for "hear" in this verse is also "hearken"
        - also means "give audience"
      - God hears/sees/knows everything
        - God heard "the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah" (Genesis 18:20)
        - He is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Hebrews 4:15)
        - He will provide "grace to help" (Hebrews 4:16)
  - 1 John 5:14 AMP – "if we ask anything (make any request) according to His will (in agreement with His own plan), He listens to and hears us"
    - "The safest way to know that you are praying in God's will is to pray God's Word!" George Mueller
- **Examples of Prayers Not in God's Will:**
  - Jesus – "let this cup pass from me" (Matthew 26:39)
    - "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak"
    - Jesus knew the will of God
    - He was praying in the flesh
    - we, too, often pray in the flesh
    - God did not answer this prayer
  - Paul – had a "thorn in the flesh" that he prayed 3 times for God to take it away
    - God did not answer (give audience) to this request
    - God said, "My grace is sufficient for thee"
    - God knew that it was necessary for Paul to have that thorn (God's purpose)
      - Paul – "lest I should be exalted above measure" (2 Corinthians 12:7)
      - it kept him humble
- **Examples of Divine Providence**
  - **Judas Iscariot** – God allowed Judas to make choices that led to Jesus being crucified
    - he was a thief (John 12:6)
    - betrayal of Jesus (Matthew 26:13-15)
    - "devil" (John 6:70), or "false accuser"
    - God's providential plan (before the beginning of the world) was for Jesus to pay the ultimate price
    - Yet, God's will for Judas' life was not for him to be lost
    - God allowed Judas to make his own choices
    - Luke 22:22 "And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!"
  - **Joseph**
    - Genesis 50:20 – "ye [his brothers] thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good"
      - Septuagint – "Ye took counsel against me for evil, but God took counsel for me for good that the matter might be as it is today."
    - (Discuss Bible story of Joseph)
      - favored son
      - coat of many colors

- brother's jealousy
- cast him into a pit
- sold him to Ishmaelites
- purchased as a slave
- lied on by Potiphar's wife
- cast into prison
- Consider the personal choices of people in Joseph's life that were against God's will (moral law)
  - jealousy
  - hatred
  - slavery
  - lying
- How was God's providential will (purpose, intention) working?
  - a famine was coming (7 years)
  - God needed to preserve His people (only about 70 at this time)
    - a Savior was to come from these people
  - God needed Joseph in Egypt (in Pharaoh's court)
  - God allowed:
    - the jealousy and hatred by Joseph's brothers
  - God intervened:
    - brothers wanted to kill Joseph
    - God gave them the idea to sell him instead
    - Made sure the right caravan (headed for Egypt) passed by (Genesis 37:28)
  - God allowed:
    - Joseph to be sold as a slave
  - God intervened:
    - Potiphar was the one who bought Joseph
    - why did it matter?
    - Potiphar was part of Pharaoh's court
      - when Joseph was sent to prison – not just any prison
      - the prison where Pharaoh's prisoners were kept
  - Note: while Joseph was in prison – "the Lord was with Joseph" (Genesis 39:21)
  - **Consider:**
    - what did Joseph learn as the manager of Potiphar's estate that prepared him for being 2<sup>nd</sup> in command?
    - what did Joseph learn as the administrator of the prison that prepared him for Pharaoh's court?
    - how did God work/allow things to happen to make sure Joseph had all the necessary preparation?
    - Was the butler super forgetful (2 years before he remembered Joseph) or did Joseph need more time developing his talents and skills?
      - or was it just not time yet?
    - How did Potiphar's wife's lies work for good?
      - life lesson – when people tell lies about you, consider this story
      - Joseph would have continued as Potiphar's manager – never getting to Pharaoh's court
    - What kind of prayers do you think Joseph had been praying?
      - In the pit – "God, get me out of here! Rescue me!"

- Sold as a slave – "God, don't let them sell me! Rescue me!"
- Being lied on – "God, let Potiphar find out the truth! Rescue me!"
- In prison – "God, remind the butler to tell Pharaoh about me!"
- Did those prayers get answered in the way Joseph must have been praying them?
  - God heard the pain and anguish
  - God (no doubt) helped Joseph to handle it (My grace is sufficient)
  - But God didn't answer (rescue Joseph)
- At the end, Joseph could look back and say, "God meant it [everything that had happened] for good."
  - God's providential will was to get His people in Egypt for their protection/preservation during the upcoming famine
- **Esther**
  - Was brought to the king's house to be considered (potential queen)
  - What had happened to Vashti?
    - Did God force Vashti to make her decisions?
  - Esther won the heart of Hegai ("pleased him" and "obtained kindness from him" and "he preferred her")
  - Esther won the heart of the king ("loved ... above all women")
    - Why is this important?
  - Why did God need a Jewess close to the king?
  - Haman "sought to destroy all the Jews" (Esther 3:6)
  - God set His plan in motion
    - Esther had a will – she could have refused
      - if so, quite possibly "deliverance [would] arise to the Jews from another place" (Esther 4:14)
      - she might have felt safe – she was the queen, after all
    - Esther 4:14 – "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"
    - God's providential plan was being fulfilled
- **The Apostle John**
  - last living Apostle
  - no doubt, in great demand
  - sent to the Isle of Patmos – to prevent his preaching
    - must have felt this was ill-timed
    - might have thought: "God, what is going on? The church needs me."
    - did not realize what God had in mind
    - The Book of Revelation has continued to bless the church for over 2,000 years
    - Would John have been able to find the time to write it otherwise?
    - Consider 1, 2, and 3 John (written after John returned)
      - consider the length of these books – no doubt John had returned to his busy life
- **John Bunyan**
  - very poor
  - family
    - four children, wife died, daughter blind, married 18 year old Elizabeth
  - "just promise to stop preaching, John"
  - 12 years – Bedford jail
  - wrote Pilgrim's Progress

- **His Purpose, His Good**
  - Romans 8:28 – "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."
    - everything might not be good by itself – works together
      - like a recipe
    - Romans 8:31 – "If God be for us, who can be against us?"
      - must remember God is not working against us
    - God puts things into motion based on His intention, His plan for each of us
  - Personal and Corporate Plans
    - God has a corporate plan – the plan of salvation
    - God has a personal plan – He wants you to be saved
      - to be "conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29)
      - to be made copies of Christ
- **Our View**
  - Consider the long-term effects of the above examples
  - How might we learn from them in our current situations?
  - Consider the long-time benefit versus the "light affliction" (2 Corinthians 4:17)
  - Consider:
    - Jesus' disciples during the 3 days after the Crucifixion
      - "Did we misunderstand?"
      - "We thought He was the Messiah"
      - "The last three years of our life make no sense"
      - Then came the morning!
  - Job 23:14 "he performeth the thing appointed for me: and many such things are with him"
  - Matthew 5:45 – "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."
    - too many want to serve God for the loaves and the fishes
    - God wants us to serve Him because we love Him
    - Thus, He allows natural experiences to come to all (sickness, disease, disasters)
      - the difference with the Christian – what they are accomplishing
        - these things work good in the Christian's life
      - we have "exceeding great and precious promises" (2 Peter 1:4)
      - one promise – "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28)
        - note: combining "love" and "his purpose"
        - God's purpose is because He loves us
  - How could Paul say that "none of these things move me" (Acts 20:24)?
    - he was committing his life to Divine Providence
    - "the purpose of him who worketh" (Ephesians 1:11)
  - **How to pray**
    - Follow Christ's example: "not my will but thine be done"
    - Psalm 143:10 – "Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God"
    - Romans 8:26 – "we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered"
  - **Keep in mind:**
    - God is working good "according to HIS purpose"
    - Romans 8:31 – "God be for us"
    - Matthew 10:30 – "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

- Philippians 1:6 – "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ"
- There's peace in knowing, Lord, You're in control

**Additional Sources**

- <https://www.gotquestions.org/divine-providence.html>