

How Does Providence Make You Feel?

Article by

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The providence of God is most often ignored, sometimes despised, and occasionally prized. I wonder how the idea of his absolute sovereignty over all things, at all times, in all places falls on a heart like yours.

Have you largely ignored his providence? Many people in the world blindly assume either that there is no God or that he cannot or would not interfere with human life. They cannot yet conceive of a world in which God meticulously orchestrates history, including the twists and turns, highs and lows of their own stories.

Or have you been exposed to providence and hated what you heard? For some, the sovereignty of God over all things and in all things undoes the world they know and love — the world they have made, the world they think they rule. For them, providence is an archaic and offensive myth. How could anyone believe that, much less rejoice in it?

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And yet we do. In a world in which many ignore the providence of God and some despise the providence of God, some of us build our lives on it. We are learning to see everything through the prism of its wonder, beauty, safety, and majesty. The providence of God has become our sanctuary of worship and awe, our treasury of peace and security, our source of courage and strength, our well of wonder.

What Does God *Not* Do?

Where might we look to see the providence of God in the Bible? We could wrestle with how God “works all things according to the counsel of his will” ([Ephesians 1:11](#)). We could travel the heights and depths of the world with the psalmist: “Whatever the Lord pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps” ([Psalm 135:6](#)). We could visit the rulers and governments on every continent: “He makes nations great, and he destroys them; he enlarges nations, and leads them away” ([Job 12:23](#); see also [Proverbs 21:1](#)).

We could watch the womb, that most wondrous and fragile of homes, where God weaves together every son and every daughter, forming each of their days before they are born ([Psalm 139:13–16](#)). We could contemplate how Christ “upholds the universe” — galaxies and goldfish, oceans and sunflowers, mountain ranges and mosquitoes — “by the word of his power” ([Hebrews 1:3](#); see also [Colossians 1:17](#)). We could even study a simple blade of grass: “You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate” ([Psalm 104:14](#)). All of this might leave us wondering what God does *not* do.

As we have already seen, though, it is one thing to observe and acknowledge the providence of God, and quite another to embrace providence and cherish providence — to let it have its full emotional effect on our hearts. John Piper writes,

God has revealed his purposeful sovereignty over good and evil in order to humble human pride, intensify human worship, shatter human hopelessness, and put ballast in the battered boat of human faith, steel in the spine of human courage, gladness in the groans of affliction, and love in the heart that sees no way forward. (*Providence*, 13)

So, where could we go in Scripture to see how the sovereignty of God over all things ought to fall on a believing heart? What *should* it feel like to witness and experience his pervasive sovereignty?

Pleasantness of Providence

We could go to a number of places, but Psalm 147 models the humility, trust, and joy that God means for us to experience before his providence. As the psalmist traces God's sovereign hand through creation and history, he cannot help but *sing*.

Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting. (Psalm 147:1)

This is not a reluctant or detached admittance of providence. This psalm is a voyage of wonder, a symphony of trust, a soul set on fire.

Great is our Lord, and *abundant* in power;

his understanding is *beyond measure*. (Psalm 147:5)

When a heart like his witnesses the providence of God, he knows that he sees only the fringes of his glory — only the hints of his greatness, only measures of his power, only glimpses of his understanding. The sovereignty of God over all we can see reminds us just how much of his majesty we cannot see.

PROVIDENCE TOWARD CREATION

In his providence, God scatters lights in the night sky:

He determines the number of the stars;

he gives to all of them their names. (Psalm 147:4)

He not only places them, but names them. They each mean something unique to him. They all shine with the reflection of his majesty and sovereignty, but each in its own light. And the vast, vast majority shine in ways we cannot even see with the naked eye. But God sees them, and he knows their names, because he put them there, set them on fire, and keeps them ablaze.

He covers the heavens with clouds;

he prepares rain for the earth;

he makes grass grow on the hills.

He gives to the beasts their food,

and to the young ravens that cry. ([Psalm 147:8-9](#))

We cannot avoid the providence of God. If clouds come, it is because he blew them into being.

If raindrops fall, it is because he deploys them from above. If blades of grass spring up from our yards again in a couple of months, it is because he bids them rise. If the sun climbs over the horizon again tomorrow, it is because God provokes it to do so ([Matthew 5:45](#)).

He gives snow like wool;

he scatters frost like ashes.

He hurls down his crystals of ice like crumbs;

who can stand before his cold?

He sends out his word, and melts them;

he makes his wind blow and the waters flow. ([Psalm 147:16-18](#))

The seasons, with their unique hues and shadows, unveil new vistas of providence. Even winter, the cruelest of the four (at least here in Minnesota), sings the sovereignty of God — the snow lightly laid like wool, the ground meticulously coated with frost, the icicles measured to the millimeter, the chilling temperature set with precision. And then, as sovereignly as it all came to be, it all melts and gives way to life again.

And all of that serves as less than a trailer of the providence we witness every day, wherever we live in the wild world God has made. Again, Piper writes, “God does not intend for us to look at the world he has made and feel nothing. When the psalmist says, ‘The heavens declare the glory of God’ ([Psalm 19:1](#)), he does not mean this only for the clarification of theology. He means it for the exultation of our souls” (*Providence*, 21).

PROVIDENCE TOWARD PEOPLE

But the providence of God is not limited to stars and clouds, to lions and ravens, to rain and snow. He also sovereignly works in and through the lives of people — of all people — and for the everlasting good of those he loves.

The Lord builds up Jerusalem;

he gathers the outcasts of Israel.

He heals the brokenhearted

and binds up their wounds. (Psalm 147:2-3)

“As the psalmist traces God’s sovereign hand through creation and history, he cannot help but sing.”

If God is as wise and powerful as Scripture says he is, it is not all that surprising that he sovereignly works all things according to his plans. It *is* surprising, however, that he would use that power, that authority, that providence to heal broken hearts, to bind up wounded souls, to choose, forgive, and adopt sinners — sinners like us. The psalmist writes here of the old-covenant people of God, the nation of Israel, but how much more true must this be for those redeemed in Christ?

He strengthens the bars of your gates;

he blesses your children within you.

He makes peace in your borders;

he fills you with the finest of the wheat. (Psalm 147:13-14)

God stood by their gates. God gave them sons and daughters. God crushed their enemies. God gave their fields growth. Providence was their hope of survival, the walls around their city, the spring of their life. Throughout the Old Testament, the extraordinary and undeserved blessings Israel enjoyed repeatedly prove the awesome, merciful sovereignty of God. And they anticipate even greater blessings for the church — a fuller peace, a surer security, a sweeter joy, a new heart, and a better home.

Providence Toward You

The pervasive sovereignty of God falls pleasantly on a soul when we see his providence in the light of his love for us. The psalm ends,

[The Lord] declares his word to Jacob,

his statutes and rules to Israel.

He has not dealt thus with any other nation;

they do not know his rules. ([Psalm 147:19-20](#))

He has not dealt thus with any other nation. It was true of Israel, and it is all the more so for the true Israel, the church. The one who does all that he pleases works all things — pervasively, meticulously, constantly — for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose ([Romans 8:28](#)). If God is entirely and eternally for us, not against us, then nothing could be sweeter than to know that he is totally and unavoidably sovereign. This God rules and upholds the universe, he decides history, he governs the nations, he controls all things, and, in Christ, *he loves you*.

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