

Providence in Families

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[0:00] Well, it's the providence of God. It's been some time since we've studied together, and we come to the chapter on family affairs. John Flavel wants us to acknowledge and to see the hand of God in our families, and he begins that God's hand of providence has not been paralyzed in that matter of great significance, that of selecting a marriage partner for you.

Turn to Proverbs 19 and verse 14. Proverbs 19 and verse 14. We're going to talk about spouses and children and how God's hand of providence is ruled in this area of our lives.

Proverbs 19 and verse 14. We have here the testimony of Scripture with regard to the providence of God in this matter of spouses.

Houses and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the Lord. Back one chapter in 1822.

He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord. So however our spouses come to us as to the precise details, it is the hand of providence that is behind it all.

[1:37] They come from the Lord. It's always been the practice of holy men of God to seek God's guidance for this decision.

Think of God's special providence regarding Abraham's servant and his choice of a wife for Isaac. Remember, as Abraham was growing older, he charged his servant. He made him swear an oath to him that he would not take a woman of the world, we would say, for Abraham's son Isaac, but that he would return to his family and find a God-fearing woman from that family.

And so that servant of Abraham went to seek a wife for Isaac, not from the Canaanites, but from Abraham's family.

So he went with his ten camels laden down with good things. And as he drew near to the place, you can find this wonderful story of providence in Genesis 24.

[2:43] Perhaps he prayed, teaching us that this is a matter of spiritual prayer, the selection of a wife.

Now, I'm not saying that we ought to follow everything that this servant of Abraham did and our selection of a wife, that we should lay some kind of fleece before the Lord, as this man did.

But the principle of praying for God to guide us in this matter is for us to imitate in seeking a mate for ourselves or for our children.

God shows that something we should pray is to honor and to answer. Even before he had finished praying, Rebecca came out with her jar on her shoulder.

Let me just read the prayer of this man, Abraham's servant, Genesis 24, 12 to 14. Then he prayed, O Lord God of my master Abraham, give me success today and show kindness to my master Abraham.

[4:00] See, I am standing beside this spring and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. May it be that when I say to a girl, please let down your jar that I may have a drink.

And she says, drink, and I'll water your camels too. Let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you are the one to my master.

So there's his prayer. And no sooner has he said amen than here is Rebecca coming out with her jar on her shoulder.

And she took the jar and came up from the well and the servant said, Drink, my Lord, she said. And she said, I'll draw water for your camels too until they have finished drinking.

No small work for 30 thirsty camels. And she took him to her home and met the family and told them of Abraham and Isaac and of the answered prayer that he had made with regard to the matter.

[5:13] And they agreed to give her to become the wife of Isaac. But the next morning when he was ready to leave, they said, oh, Terry, a few days, stay with us. And he says, no, I'm on business for my master.

I must go at once. Please send me on my way. They said, send for the girl. We'll ask her, will you go with this man? And she says, I will go. So this holy servant prayed for guidance in this matter and he then gave thanks upon receiving that guidance.

Now, that was a wonderful providence and an extraordinary providence, but we ought not to miss the more ordinary providences of God that are just as much God directing us with regard to the spouses that he prepared for us.

First lesson is much of providence seen in appointing the particular partner for us. And in this, God often goes beyond our thoughts and plans and even against our plans and thoughts, crossing men's desires and plans for their own good.

And he gives them not what they expect, but what his perfect wisdom deems best and most beneficial for his designs. So there have been strange and improbable ways that God has brought two spouses together, proving that he's the one doing it.

[6:42] Maybe Abraham's servant is one of the most unusual. Do any of you have stories of unusual ways that God brought you together?

You say, that had God's fingerprints all over it. As for me, I grew up near my wife's family, and her parents and my parents were friends, and the rest is history.

But he determines the times and places where we live. And through that providence, I met my wife. Did you have some strange providence in your life or ordinary providence that you would share? Dennis? Dennis? Well, all of us have stories to tell.

Maybe some less spectacular than others in your own eyes, but in your eyes, it ought to be real spectacular because of the one you've got. But the point is, in these matters, God is the one who is ordering all of his creatures and all of their actions all of the time, and he is appointing the particular partner for us.

[8:02] The second lesson, there is much of providence seen in the harmony that he gives to two very different people in marriage. Much of providence seen in the way that he causes two people to live in harmony together.

And how many comforts of our lives flow from harmony at home? Is that not true? That when there's harmony at home, it's like there could be war on many other fronts, but there's so much comfort in us in life through that harmony.

Though there may be differences in our upbringing, differences in our temperament, God makes the two one. And he teaches these who not long ago were perhaps strangers to love one another. That's God at work in his creatures, and he's to be praised. The third lesson, sometimes, is actually remarkable in making one spouse instrumental to the eternal good of the other.

All right, 1 Peter chapter 3. Let's turn that passage up as we read Peter's word to the wife with an unconverted husband.

[9:23] 1 Peter 3 and verse 1. Wives, in the same way, be submissive to your husbands so that if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.

So, God has actually brought two people together and used one to the eternal good of the other. The salvation. If both are converted, God has also... God has also... As they live as heirs together of the grace of life.

Verse 3, or verse 7 of this passage. Husbands, in the same way, be considerate as you live with your wives and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

And so, there's the eternal good of some have been used to the salvation of their spouses. But even where both are converted, there's been much good that has come as they live together as heirs of the grace of life, sharing all of life together, maximizing, doubling its blessings, and cutting in half its sorrows by having one to share them with.

[11:03] So that if you both are saved, you need to be most thankful. Many do not share this blessedness. Even in Scripture, there were some very unequal matches.

Flavel mentions Abigail, a very wise and godly woman, but very unsuitably matched to a man, Nabal, whose name, who lived up to his name, a fool.

And it greatly affected her life. We can only imagine some of the ways that Abigail's life was affected by being married to a fool. David had his scoffing wife, Michal, who did not appreciate the Lord as David did.

You can read of that in 2 Samuel 6.20 as he's rejoicing the ark of God as they're bringing it into Jerusalem. She sees it and she rebukes him for it.

God strikes her barren. She did not share in the joy of the things of God with David. There's Job, at least in that one particular incident, the one picture we see of his wife is that rather than having the support of a godly wife in his most severe time of trial, finds the additional affliction of a wife who became the temptress of the devil, telling him to curse God and die, which was the very goal that Satan had in the whole situation, to get Job to curse God and die.

[12 : 39] So he told God what would happen. If you touch him and take his things, he'll curse you to your face and she becomes the instrument of faith. So even, it's not fair to say that that was a total mismatch, at least that one situation, but in any of these mismatches, even there, God uses these instruments to work much good to sanctify and to glorify himself, to sanctify his children because it's under such afflictions that men have been made, women have been made to seek the Lord with all of their hearts.

Even in those areas where as husbands and wives we rub one another wrong, is not God pleased to use that for our further sanctification, to show us just how deep our love of self goes and to show us just how much we want it our way and thereby to humble us, to teach us greater Christ-likeness and servanthood.

Could it be that God's thoughts are higher than your thoughts and that he knows better than we do what's best for us and how to get glory to himself in our lives?

Maybe your marriage isn't one that easily falls together. Maybe you have to work hard at it, but in that hard labor, for God is teaching you and sanctifying you and glorifying himself.

Remember our definition of the providence of God is his most wise upholding and controlling of all of his creatures.

[14 : 19] God is wise in this business of the spouse that he's given us and he seeks more than our comfort and ease. He seeks our holiness, greater likeness to Christ, growth and denial of self and mortification of our flesh.

And he knows just the right mix of things to accomplish it, including the marriage partner that he's given us. So that's the first section of this chapter, to appreciate the providence of God in our marriages.

But then the second area that he deals with is to recognize God's hand of providence as it's involved in giving us children the fruit of marriage. Sons are a heritage from the Lord and children a reward from him, Psalm 127.3.

To have any offspring is a gift from God. Many don't. Or if they do, they cannot enjoy them as they live to torment them.

What a grief was Esau to Isaac and... their son Esau. What a pain.

[15 : 39] Marrying those two Canaanite women to bring Rebecca to the place of saying... Was it Rachel?

No, Rebecca. That's right. To the place of saying, life is so bitter for me. Remember as well the grief that came to David through his sons Absalom and Amnon.

Grief from children. So, to have any family is a mercy. To have a unified family is a double mercy. To have a godly family is a triple mercy. And we trace it back to the hand of providence. So the godly have turned to him in prayer for the gift of children knowing that it's he who opens and shuts the womb.

You remember Baron Hannah and she's praying in the temple. What's she praying for? She's praying for children. As if God is the one who gives children as indeed he does.

[16 : 45] And so, Flavel's just using the scriptures to prove his point. She prays for a son. And so, in the course of time, Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son and she named him Samuel saying, because I asked the Lord for him.

In other words, God's the one who gave this son. And that's as true of every one of your children as it was of Hannah's. It was because God gave them to you whether you ask for them or not.

He is the giver of them. Samuel sounds like the Hebrew word for heard of God. She was heard from God and he answered in giving her a son. The same was true of Zechariah and Elizabeth.

Elizabeth was barren. Both were old. and he is in the temple and receives the word from the angel saying, don't be afraid, Zechariah.

Your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son and you are to give him the name John. One of the reasons for which the Lord is to be praised is found in Psalm 119.

[17 : 55] He settles the barren of children. That's his hand of providence and so he's to be praised.

So we recognize the providence of God in the giving of children. That's the second major mouth label turns to so how are we to respond then to God's providence in our families?

Well, first of all, he says acknowledge it. Acknowledge God's wise and good hand of providence behind it. Remember when Jacob left home to go seek a wife.

He went out empty and he came back with a large family and as he's coming back, this is his prayer, Genesis 32.10, I am unworthy of all the kindnesses and faithfulness.

Faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups. So when I left home and was headed out for a wife, I had a staff and that was it.

[19 : 12] Now that I'm returning home, I have two groups, massive families and servants and herds and he not only sees it, but he acknowledges it that it's God's kindnesses and God's faithfulness because God had promised to bless him and he's humbled under it.

He says, I'm unworthy of this. It's no small thing to be humbled and melted under God's providence for his mercies to us.

What a wonderful thing to have God's gifts to us humble us and that's what we find with Jacob. He's acknowledging, humbly acknowledging God's goodness to him and God is glorified when we ascribe to him the glory due him for his providence in our family.

So that's the first thing. What are we to do? We're to acknowledge it, humbly, giving thanks to God and secondly, we're to carefully discharge our God's hand has given us.

Has God's providence given you a husband? Then submit to him as the church submits to Christ.

Has God's providence given you a wife? Then love her and give yourself to her as Christ sacrificially gave himself to the church.

[20 : 34] Has God in providence given you children? Then bring them up in the discipline and the training of the Lord. So use your relations to the people which God designed them.

Walk together, husbands and wives, as co-heirs together of the grace of life. Strive to be mutual blessings to each other. Live with each other in such a way that the parting day may be sweet and not full of regrets, Flavel says.

I quote him, death will shortly break up family and then nothing but the sense of duty discharged or the neglects pardoned will give comfort.

So that's what we're to do in response to providence. Acknowledge God thankfully and humbly and then discharge your duties toward the family that God has given you.

And then the next section he talks about, he says, think of God's providence who cared for your needs as a family. He's promised his people and my God will supply all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

[21 : 52] Can you not testify that the Lord has provided for your family all that you have had need of? Think of how he has prepared, how he has provided for you.

Think of the constancy of God's provision for your family. He provides not just sporadically, not just one or two pressing needs, but moment by moment every day all your days his compassions never fail.

They're new every morning. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. So think of the constancy, how constant God's provision has been for you and your family.

Think of the timing in the second place of his providence. Think of the timing in the way he's provided for you. How his provisions have come to you just in the time of your need.

Isaiah 41, 17 and 18 says, The poor and needy seek for water, but there is none. Their tongues are parched with thirst. I, the Lord, will answer them.

[23 : 03] I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. I will make rivers flow on barren heights and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water and the parched ground into spring.

When? When they're thirsty and without water. In other words, in the time of their need. The point Flavel is making by quoting this passage is that God often lets us feel our needs as family.

We're thirsty and there's no water. He lets us come into the pinch. We have this need and there is nothing to meet that need where we may even begin to worry about them.

But he does it in this way so as to magnify his love and care in the timing in which he supplies our need. Deuteronomy 8:3 read He led you all the way in the desert to humble you and test you in order to know what was in your heart whether or not you would keep his commands.

He humbled you causing you to hunger. How does he do that? Well he withholds that which would satisfy hunger. That's what God did. He caused them to hunger causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna which neither you nor your fathers had known to teach you that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

[24:33] And so he times the supply of their need along so that it comes after our sense of need and perhaps even our prayers for it.

And that makes us better appreciate his goodness when his supply does come. We'd like the cupboard constantly kept full. So we always know the cupboard is full.

But God has a way of letting the cupboard go bare and then meeting our need as we need it. He does that from time to time that we might the better see his provision and rejoice in it.

He knows we pray better and we appreciate the supply more when we're made to cry for it. so he lets the shelves be depleted that we might look to him and then rejoice in his provision.

I don't know if you were moved by what Naphtali shared with us in this Sunday school hour last week how some people in his church literally are existing hand to mouth and as they wake up in the morning the cupboards are absolutely bare and the men go out and sit around and wait for work day work and if they have work they have money they go buy food and when they get home the family eats but if not they don't and they don't have something for breakfast the next day either and they go to bed knowing that and I thought you know I think that the day in which Jesus lived life was more hard than what it is today it was probably more like Naphtali's situation than it is like ours and why Jesus would say as he preached to the people of Palestine don't worry about what you will eat or what you will drink don't worry about tomorrow can you see in that context you would be so tempted to worry about tomorrow as you went to bed so tempted to worry about what we shall eat or drink but this God times his provisions and lets his people feel the pinch and feel the hunger the thirst and then he supplies their needs now he's done so in ordinary ways he can just bless a little and make it serve and sufficient for our family he gives daily strength to continue at our jobs he opens up new work for us he brings

[27:21] Israel's crops rain right there in the promised land that's ordinary isn't it rain but in so doing God is providing the needs of his people but other times it's been in extraordinary ways as manna from heaven so there's no food and God will meet his people's needs in extraordinary ways bread falls from heaven or like in the days of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath the jar of flour that was not used up and the jug of oil that never ran dry until the Lord sent rain on the earth and ended the drought so in one way or another either in some extraordinary way or in some ordinary way God has been meeting your needs I had a family tell me of a situation during the general assembly of a bill that came due and they were fretting over what are we going to do it was an unexpected bill and the next day there was a check in the mail that was more than sufficient for their need you see

God sometimes does it in extraordinary ways in the timing of which that we oh yes this is not chance this is my God but it's the same thing when we head out the door with health to our jobs and we come home without an accident and we get to the end of the week and there's a paycheck it's our God providing for us and our families Anthony Ash writes one morsel of God's provision especially when it comes in unexpected and upon prayer when needs are most will be more sweet to a spiritual relish than all former enjoyments were to see God provide where we least expected it so think of the constancy of God's provision for your family think of the timing of his provision think also of the wisdom of God's providence and providing for us seen in the quantity of his provision for us not giving us too much not too little not supplying all our desires but all our real needs

Edgar prayed in Proverbs 30 verses 8 and 9 give me neither poverty nor riches but give me only my daily bread otherwise I may have too much and disown you and say who is the Lord or I may become poor and steal and so dishonor the name of my God I don't want to forget God and I don't want to dishonor God so just give me what I need my daily bread he wanted only the amount that he could handle in a God honoring way and so we ought to desire that with Edgar don't give me any more than what I can live with in a way that honors you and God knows that number better than we do Deuteronomy 6 the Israelites do not grow careless under his blessings when you come into the

promised land and you eat and are satisfied be careful that you do not forget the Lord who brought you out of Egypt out of the land of slavery and that's just what happened God blessed them and they forgot him for them God says in Hosea 13 6 when I fed them they were satisfied when they were satisfied then they became proud and forgot me affliction has killed her thousands but prosperity has killed her tens of thousands many have been unable to handle the blessings of God that have led to the ruin of their soul remember the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil which brought men to destruction so God is wise in his provisions for us and our families he knows just the proportion that we can handle and deals it out in wisdom accordingly Flavel ends with a few cautions number one do not forget past provisions of providence don't forget what

God has done for you in the past that was his charge against Israel more than one soon for God his works so how do we not forget God's past provisions well we do it on Thanksgiving evening don't we the night before we get together and we give thanks for God's past provisions things it it it we do it Wednesday night by Wednesday night we have opportunity to praise the Lord as we gather together to thank the Lord for his provision don't forget what God has done to provide for you and your family robs you of comfort and robs God of glory secondly don't distrust God's providence in future emergencies he quotes Psalm 78 they spoke against God saying can God spread a table in the desert when he struck the rock water gushed out and streams flowed abundantly but can he also give us food can he supply meat for his people when the

[32 : 48] Lord heard them he was very angry his fire broke out against Jacob and his wrath rose against Israel for they did not believe in God or trust in his deliverance though he had rained down manna for the people to eat so the point is don't distrust God's promise in future emergencies!

Remember his past blessings and from them derive stronger trust for future emergencies! They had water come out of a rock to quench their thirst!

They had bread come down from heaven to satisfy can he give us meat can he give us some meat to sink our and they they had no faith in God in their present and future emergency see see the providence directed towards the birds of the air Jesus would say not the birds that you feed but the ones that God feeds see how God takes care of his birds and know that he'll care for you far more you who are his children remember your relation to that God as his blood!

children that mean so much to him and trust in him in your future emergency and then thirdly don't murmur or complain in new times of need that's very natural to the flesh complaining is the native language of the flesh some need we complain something Israel fell into repeatedly to the great displeasure and judgment of God if we rightly understood what our sins deserve we would rather admire how bountiful God has been with us than complain how little his providence has supplied us he's treated us far better than our sins deserve and that's what kept David full of praise whether in the palace or running in the wilderness God is not dealing with me according to what I deserve praise the Lord of my soul all my inmost being praise his holy name we should mortify our discontent by remembering the wisdom that orders all things for our good perfect wisdom carves out your portion and lot and so

Flavel says surely what is best for you which providence has appointed and one day you yourselves will judge it to be so God has given you what is best and one day you'll judge it so yourself well that should dry up our complaining when we face new need and lastly don't neglect prayer when needs God's providence orders everything then go to him in your time of need whatever your need God's hand of providence extends to that need so where are you sensing need take it the Lord in prayer in everything praying with thanksgiving honor him as the God of providence in all you're asking believing and acknowledging Lord I believe you control my job situation that's why I seek you for blessing at my work

[36 : 17] I believe that you're the one who sends the rain and the sunshine upon the crops and as we pray it honors him and it brings him glory so those remarks Flavel would give us to recognize the hand of providence in our family life in our spouses our children and in the provision that God has made for us so that here we are alive and well another Lord's day that we might honor him with our lips we're dismissed I'll see you next time.