

Duty of Meditation On Providence

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[0:00] If you're visiting today, we welcome you. We are studying the mystery of providence by John Flavel. And we have a memory verse this morning that will become a part of our review.

! Let's say it together from Proverbs 16.33. It says, the lot is cast. Proverbs 16.33. The lot is cast into the lap at its every decision is from the Lord.

The lot was some kind of instrument of randomness, like throwing of a dice or even the flipping of a coin. And it was used for many things.

It was used to divide the inheritance of the promised land between the twelve tribes. Yesterday we gathered to divide up the physical possessions of our parents.

And we're still not done. I guess with eight kids there's a lot of stuff you need. But do you realize that all of Jesus' material possessions in life that he had amassed were distributed in a moment?

[1:20] And it was by the lot. By the casting of the lot. And the soldiers that got his things got exactly what the Lord decided that they should have.

Because it's every decision is from the Lord. And there he was. It was his things being distributed. The lot used to divide the inheritance. It was how Achan was found out, remember, as the guilty man that he was.

It's how the pagan men on the stormy sea discovered who was responsible for this storm. And the lot fell to Jonah. It's how Judas' replacement among the twelve disciples was discovered.

It's been used for settling disputes right down through history. And so this verse is teaching us something of the extent of God's providence. Just how far does God's providence reach?

And Proverbs 16.33 says it reaches right down to every decision of the flip of the coin. Things that we perceive as chance and accident.

[2:31] Thomas Scott said, What is chance to men is divine appointment to God. So even those things that look like chance and randomness to us are appointments that God is working out in his world and in his plan.

And it teaches us that providence then reaches to the smallest things. What's smaller than the flipping of a coin when you think of events that are happening in God's world?

Now, why is this important for us? Why is it important for us to know that God's providence extends down to the smallest things? Anyone?

Yeah? Pardon? To give peace, okay? Gives peace to the believer. What is it specifically about small things that gives peace?

What makes up life? Why? That's where we live most of our days, isn't it? In same small things.

[3:38] But it's also true, isn't it, that huge outcomes often turn on small things. Can you think of examples in the Bible? Something small happened, had a huge outcome.

How about the feeding of the 5,000? Pardon? The feeding of the 5,000. Well, that's right. It was a few fish and bread and it was multiplied.

Think about the reading material of the sleepless king in Esther. What's smaller than which part of history to read from tonight?

But it was that small thing upon which the whole salvation of the Jewish nation turned. And instead of the genocide under Haman, you had the Jews living on so that a savior could be born from this nation and bring salvation to the ends of the earth.

Turning on some small thing. Or we have the small thing of, well, it was a large thing that was accomplished by a small thing.

[4:44] God said wicked King Ahab is going to die an untimely death. And it happens by an arrow that a man randomly lets fly in his direction.

And providence directs it to fulfill the word of the Lord. To show that no word goes forth from his mouth without accomplishing what he said he would do.

Or the little things in Joseph's life. We saw those 11 things. Little links that without which we wouldn't have seen Joseph as the ruler in Egypt.

And so little things are often connected to large things in our lives. Maybe it's just someone glancing down at a text message that caused their car to swerve into the path of a loved one and take their life.

It is a comfort to know that even the little things are under the controlling providence of our God. So there's absolutely nothing that escapes God's control down to the falling of a bird to the ground.

[5:50] Down from the falling of a hair from your head. Every cell of cancer in your body.

It's all under his control. This is our God. All his creatures and all their actions all the time. Charles Bridges says everything is a wheel of God's providence.

So there's the watch and it's you take the back off the old watches anyway and there's all these gears. And Bridges is saying is that God's clock is so big that everything that happens is a gear in that clock.

And so what a providence is God's. Everything is a wheel of providence. That tells us he really is Lord of all.

Down to the smallest thing. All things do his bidding. Tennis is an old game. I was reading Charles Bridges commentary on this verse this morning and he wrote it in 1846.

[6:55] And he quotes this quote. When kingdoms are tossed up and down like a tennis ball, not one event can fly out of bounds of his providence. So just as you're watching a tennis match and the ball's going back and forth, but it's not going out of bounds.

So providence is such that when kingdoms are bouncing around, such as we've been watching in the Middle East and kingdoms today, kingdoms are in conflict.

And who's going to be on the map tomorrow? But not once is the ball bouncing out of bounds of God's providence.

Indeed, David rejoices in that event. Nations are in uproar. Kingdoms fall. He lifts his voice. The earth melts. God's providence. God's providence. Over all the big things of the nations.

The little things of a coin toss. So this is just a bit of review because Flavel's already taken us over this ground in his study. And these memory verses are meant to call up some of those thoughts to our minds.

[8:06] So far, we've been in part one of the book, which is proofs for God's providence. And we've been shown the various areas in our lives where God is providentially ordering things.

Now, we come to a shift in the book at this point. We come to part two. It's called Meditation on the Providence of God. And the last section is Application of the Providence of God.

So we're in the meditation on the providence of God. And starting today, we're in the chapter called The Duty of Meditation on Providence. So we've seen what it is and where it is now.

Here's your duty in light of that is to meditate on it. That's where he begins. And it is our duty for five different reasons. Number one, because God commands it.

Turn to Psalm 105 and verse 5. There are dozens of verses that we could look at. This is just one out of this whole category of verses.

[9:13] Psalm 105 and verse 5. Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced.

So the basic idea behind this point is that whatever God has done is to be remembered by us. Whatever God has done is to be remembered.

Remember the wonders he has done. He's done them. You remember them. He's performed miracles. Don't you forget them. He's pronounced judgments. Remember them.

And it's both mercies and judgments that we are to remember. Deuteronomy is a book on the second giving of the law.

The very idea, the name of the book reminds us that God is reminding his people, isn't he? It's not the first giving of the law. It's the second giving. Why the second? Because he needs to remind them of that same law.

[10:09] And one of the key words in the book is remember. Some 16 times God says to his people, remember, remember, remember.

It's our duty. It's our obligation. It's something we owe God for his acts of providence. If God in his wisdom has considered something worth doing, then we are to consider it worth pondering, worth meditating, thinking about, remembering.

Now, the very ability to remember is amazing, isn't it? Some of us have seen that slip and go completely gone, it seems. The ability to recall is a gift of God to us.

Think what life would be without it. Just, you couldn't remember the combination on your locker. Remember, you'd be tardy every class, wouldn't you?

You couldn't remember your phone number, your anniversary date, where you put your eyeglasses or your keys, how long it takes to get to church, how long it takes to get to work, how to do your work, what foods you like, what foods you're allergic to.

[11 : 29] If we couldn't remember, life would be a mess. And so recall is a gift of God, and he's telling us that no small part of it is to be used on his providence, remembering the works that he has done.

And so to read the Bible is to bump into this everywhere, that God is reminding his people of his works, and he's calling on us to remember them.

Now, to remember them means to dwell on them to the point that they make an impact upon our lives. Not just, oh yeah, I remember.

I remember the day God saved me. Sure, I haven't forgotten that one yet. No, it's to remember in such a way that that has an impact upon me today. That's the idea behind remembering, not forgetting as you read your Bible.

to dwell on them to the point that they make an impact on your life. So Micah chapter 6, verses 4 and 5, God says to his people, I brought you up out of Egypt.

[12 : 32] That was their redemption. I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. My people, remember what Balak, king of Moab, counseled and what Balaam, son of Beor, answered.

Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord. Remember what Balak wanted Balaam to do.

He wanted him to curse you. And remember what came out of the mouth of Balaam when he opened his mouth. Blessing tumbled out. I made that happen.

Remember it. Remember your journey and all the ways I led you and took care of you. Remember it. Remember it in a way that it changes the way you think about me, the way you live before me.

So that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord. If you don't remember, you'll not know my righteousness as you ought. So God's acts of providence are like revelations about himself.

[13 : 43] They reveal his power, his wisdom, his love, his righteousness, and so on. So whatever God does becomes a lesson to us. A lesson to us.

And so to ignore providence is to ignore our lesson book. And we run into trouble when we ignore the lessons of the past. To not remember your past lessons and failures is to be doomed to repeat them.

This do in remembrance of me. Probably the most important providence that's ever happened in God's world. When Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, took our sins on him and took them to the place of punishment and was crushed for us.

So do this, the Lord's table, in remembrance of me. Not just, oh yeah, Jesus died for my sins. We've never forgotten that.

No. Think, meditate, consider it until it affects the way you live and love and trust and obey me. God's word is often calling us to consider the works of providence.

[14 : 56] Sometimes, the Holy Spirit puts the word behold in front of one of his providences. Or see, look at this. Psalm 66, 5. Come and see what God has done.

How awesome his works in man's behalf. He turned the sea into dry land. They passed through the waters on foot. Come, let us rejoice in him.

So there, there's the come and see. Look at this. Consider. Stop and think. And having done so, let us rejoice in him.

Here, meditating on providence is food for our joy. That having thought about the great works of God, we will rejoice in him.

Could it be that the level of our joy in life is directly related to our meditating on God's providence? What he's done. God commands our joy, but he also commands our meditation on his providence,

which is the means to our joy.

[16:07] One of the means, the roads to joy. You're familiar with the passage in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus, again, calls our attention to some providence.

He says, don't worry about your life, what you'll eat or drink, or what you will wear. Look! Behold! Look at the birds of the air. They do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

Are you not much more valuable than they? Now that's one of God's works of providence that he sustains and he upholds all his creatures, all their actions all the time.

So there's that birdie and he's still alive. Stop and think. Look! Consider, Jesus says. Until something in that providence of God feeds your faith to where you trust in God to feed you and to meet all of your needs.

He goes on, and why do you worry about your clothes? See! How the lilies of the field grow. They don't labor or spin, yet I tell you not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

[17:13] If that's how God clothes the grass of the field which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith.

So here we see meditating on the providence of God is meant to be food to our faith. O you of little faith, if you would just meditate on my providence over that lily, that grass of the field and how I clothe it with such beauty, your meditation should bring you to the place where you will trust me to clothe you.

far more than clothing, something that's here today and gone tomorrow. So we see that the providence of God is meant to be meditated on, meant to be considered that it might strengthen faith, joy, trust, obedience, all the graces of the Christian life.

So that's the first reason for our duty. How do we know that it's a duty to meditate on God's providence? Because God commands it. God tells us to do so.

The second reason is that God commends it. Psalm 111 and verse 2. I don't know that it's a command, but he's surely commending this to us when we read in 111, 2, great are the works of the Lord.

[18:46] They are pondered by all who delight in them. Verse 4 says, he's caused his wonders to be remembered. And so this is something that the godly have always done.

They have pondered the works of the Lord. Psalm 104, we have an example of this, of the way that the godly ponder the works of the Lord.

And here the works of the Lord are his works in creation and then sustaining all of creation. You see that throughout the psalm that God upholds and provides for all of his creatures.

He opens his hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing. And so it's a study of creation and how God sustains it.

Verse 24. How many are your works, O Lord, in wisdom you made them all. The earth is full of your creatures. And at the end, verse 34, we see, May my meditation be pleasing to him as I rejoice in the Lord.

[19:58] So David's been meditating on God's providence in the creative order. How God does this with the mountain goats, how he feeds them and he takes care of the lions, he takes care of mankind and all of this is going on.

And David, the psalmist here, is meditating on God's works of providence. And he says, May it be pleasing to you. May it be pleasing to you.

God, may you take pleasure as I meditate on your providence in feeding the mountain goat. God, we see then, God is commending to us this work of pondering his works of providence.

Thirdly, it's clearly a duty for us because the neglect of meditating on his works is everywhere in scriptures condemned as a sin. So we saw it was commanded as a duty.

Now, we can also draw the fact from the negative that it is condemned as a sin to forget, to neglect, to meditate. Psalm 78, 11 says they forgot what he had done, the wonders he had shown them, but you're here in Psalm 106, Psalm 106 and verse 13.

[21:20] And again, there are many of these passages in the Psalms. These are just a couple. 106, 13. But they soon forgot what he had done and did not wait for his counsel.

Now, the problem with the Israelites was not that they had the early onset of Alzheimer's or that they had a weak memory.

When it says that they soon forgot, they forgot. Again, that's not how the Bible uses this in this context, uses the idea of forgetting and remembering.

Its lessons were forgotten. It no longer made a difference in the way that they lived that God had brought them through the Red Sea.

I don't believe any Israelite that walked through the Red Sea ever forgot the event. But that event no longer controlled them and no longer controlled the way they behaved and what they believed about God and about his trustworthiness and about his goodness and about his authority over them.

[22:27] It no longer weighed in with power over them. They soon forgot verses 21 to 23. They forgot the God who saved them, who had done great things in Egypt, wondrous works in the land of Ham and awesome deeds by the Red Sea.

Therefore he said he would destroy them had not Moses his chosen one stood in the breach before him to keep his wrath from destroying him. Now God's wrath doesn't destroy people for weak memories.

Thank God that's not the kind of God he is. He pities those with weak memories. He helps those with weak memories. That's not the point here when he speaks of his wrath breaking out because they forgot.

No, they forgot what a wonderful Savior he had been to them. So that in the next trial instead of trusting him and thanking him they are now doubting him and disobeying him and complaining to be careless and unobservant and forgetful of what God has done is very displeasing to God.

Now why is this? Why is that something that God detests? Why is it something that he says my wrath will fall upon you for that? This is a big thing to God. That's very obvious from these passages.

[23:51] What is it about forgetting God's providence that is such a serious thing that God threatens destruction and his wrath falls?

What is it that's so offensive to God about forgetting his providence in our history, our lives, redemptive history? God does praise and glory do it now.

Excellent. Why does God do anything he does? For his honor, his glory, his fame, and when we fail to even think of it, we don't give him the praise.

Dale? we forget that he is the source of all wisdom and supply, so we rely on our own wisdom, our own creativity of supply.

So we turn away from the one ever-blessed, living, giving God and we then put ourselves in his place. That's pretty offensive, isn't it, to think that we would put us where only God belongs.

[24:58] Yeah, Bruce? That's not a thing that we see from all the fact that he's given us all that he's done. We see, that's one of the points.

Several of you have mentioned that, but that's surely at the bottom of this issue. It devalues God, doesn't it? It's like seeing the Red Sea split and saying, so what?

That's not worth really pondering. And dwelling on. To come to Calvary and say, oh, it's not really that big of a deal.

I've got ball games and this and that and everything else, houses and lands to think about, but that's not so big. So it devalues God's works when we don't ponder them, when we don't think on them.

Remember the curse in Romans 1 that came upon that generation? They did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God. Therefore, God gave them up to their sins.

[26:10] They didn't think it was worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God. So you're playing cards and you got a handful and you say, that one's a discard, that's a discard, it's not worth hanging on to.

And that's what men were doing with God and the knowledge of him. And it's what men can do with his acts of providence. That's nothing compared to what I can think about.

They treat it as if it was no big thing. Indeed, that's what Psalm 28:5 says, since they show no regard for the works of the Lord and what his hands have done, he will tear them down and never build them up again.

They don't think God's providence works are worth the time of day to them. Well, we see that this is, again, important to God.

It's a slighting, these are the words of Flavel, it's a vile slighting of God not to observe what he manifests of himself in his providences. It's irreverence, it's treating the most holy things in a very common way.

[27 : 19] Mark. I was thinking about all the times he's defined by his work of providence, isn't he? And he wants us to think of him not just as God, the Lord, but as the God who opened the way through the sea.

He attaches that description of him that we might think of him in that way. Who was it back here? Raj? That's Romans 1. That's the context of they discard God.

He's not worth thinking about. His work of creation is discarded and he's thereby treated with irreverence. So not to take notice of what God is doing with us in providence is contempt of God. It's treating him as an irrelevance to us. So God's people are warned often in scripture to not forget the works of the Lord.

Deuteronomy 4. 9. Only be careful. There's something that I'm careful about. Only be careful and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live.

[28 : 32] Teach them to your children and to their children after them. I think that's a key passage. Don't forget. Watch carefully. Guard yourself so that you don't forget what your eyes have seen and that you don't let them slip from your heart.

That's what we're talking about. It's more than just thinking oh yeah I can remember the Red Sea. No have you mold that into your heart to where it's affecting the way you live. Don't let it slip from your heart what Jesus has done on the cross for you.

Well that's the third. We can know it's our duty to meditate on providence because forgetting his works is everywhere condemned as a sin in the scriptures. Fourth without observing and considering the works of God none of the due praise for them can be given.

Now this is what Karen and Bruce both mentioned. God is to be praised he's to be thanked for his works of providence. Indeed one generation is to tell the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord to the next generation.

But you see none of this will happen. We will not praise God directly for his works of providence or praise him to our children and our children's children unless we ourselves are taken up with these works of providence.

[29 : 46] They've got to be on our hearts if we're going to communicate them to the next generation. Again we have to value these works of God as high on in our hearts to them on.

You remember Psalm 104 is divided into four different vignettes or stories about people who were in great difficulty and in great emergencies. One was sick and on the threshold of death.

Others were starving or dying of thirst in the desert. Lost. Others were on the storm-tossed sea. And at the end of each one of those little vignettes you have the Lord coming in and delivering them. And the repeated line at each place four times in Psalm 107 is let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men.

And so in all of God's acts of deliverance in our lives the big act of deliverance at Calvary but he delivers us every day from our sins and temptations and our enemies and so in every deliverance let us give thanks to the Lord.

[31 : 07] That won't happen if we were just careless about the deliverances of God the works his wonderful deeds his wonderful works for man. And he says at the end of that psalm in psalm 107 43 whoever is wise let him heed let him observe these things and consider the great love of the Lord.

All these deliverances from problems as if you're wise you will think about them you'll observe them and you'll draw the connection between the dots and you'll say wow what love God has for man.

It'll direct you to God's love. Remember I said his works of providence reveal something of himself to us. Let us observe and consider the great love of the Lord.

! Though by neglecting to meditate on his providential work in our lives we not only rob God of his due but we miss so much of his great love.

It's what fills the Psalms. They ascribe glory to God for his wonderful works. I think of that passage we just memorized in Psalm 36 6 where we praise the Lord for O Lord you preserve both man and beast.

[32 : 30] That's praising God for his providence and preserving all that he has made. And so a wonderful way to prepare for worship where we come corporately to give praise to the Lord a

wonderful way is to quiet our hearts by thinking of the works of providence in our lives this last week.

What was God up to in my life this last week? What was he doing? And whether by the eye of the physical eye or the eye of faith we should be piling up all that God in his providence has done so that when we sing our praises to him it will rise from hearts overflowing with praise.

That's one of the chief purposes for which God does his works of providence! yet without considering them we'll never give God the praise for them and then lastly without this we lose the benefit then not only does God lose the glory but we lose the benefit of all of his works that he's done in providence we rob ourselves of comfort of peace of joy of faith of obedience of worship and that's no small loss is it those are the kinds of things on which we live and so remembering God's works of providence is like food to our faith to live upon in times of distress and so from past providences we argue with ourselves to God taking care of us today and tomorrow we've got to meditate on what he's done for us in the past that's meditating on providence so when David's got a giant in front of him he's meditating on providence the Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me I think he would have said the paw of this Goliath this giant the hand of this Philistine champion he's meditating on providence and it gives him comfort in the face of a giant standing in front of him who wants his head so Paul in 2nd Corinthians 1:10 he speaks of being in a deadly peril and of trouble so great that he can't do anything to escape from himself he has delivered us from such a deadly peril and he will deliver us on him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us where did Paul get such confidence about the ongoing deliverance of

God in his life because he has delivered us God has set his love upon me and it's not going to stop until God says my time on earth is done he's going to go on delivering me and so he draws upon the memory the meditation of past providence to find comfort in the present situation how would have the faith of David and Paul been crippled and paralyzed in their emergencies without this considering of God's past providence that would have robbed themselves of comfort in their distress when have you last found help for your worry and anxiety by meditating on the providence of God that's what it's supposed to be doing for us remembering God's past providences!

[36:16] to us so it helps feed our faith and gives us comfort in our emergencies it's also the ground for holy argument in prayer remember when Moses and the children of Israel were on the border of the promised land the report of the ten unbelieving spies carried the day with the people they all grumbled they all complained they all wanted to go back to Egypt God threatened to strike them dead and start all over with the new people!

Moses intercedes the type of Christ he intercedes he prays and he recalls God's past providence in order to plead for present mercies and this is what he says in Numbers 14:19 oh God this is Moses pleading for the people in accordance with your great love forgive the sin of these people just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now all along the way it's been nothing but grace and pardon Lord what we need now is another withdrawal of the same peace pardon forgiveness grace again an argument for prayer from past provisions from God so the church is asking God to awake and act in power as in days gone by

Isaiah 51:9 and 10 awake awake clothe yourself with strength oh arm of the Lord awake as in days gone by as in generations of old was it not you who cut Rahab Egypt to pieces who pierced that monster through was it not you who dried up the sea past tense the waters of the great deep who made a road in the depths of the sea is God's providence making a difference in the way that you pray do you ever remind God of what he's done in your past in order to plead fresh mercies from him I have a prayer partner and whenever I'm facing something large and looming with it looks like a cloud like we sang of with a frowning providence he's good to remind me in prayer and he praises God right in front of me thank you for the way you've helped him in the past and what does that do to me

I'm just praying with him listening well it says yeah that's right the same God who met me there in my emptiness in my my absolute need came through am I now there again will I be there again he hasn't changed!

my faith is strengthened my comfort flows into my heart and I find myself strengthened in prayer the providence of God meant to find its way into our prayer closets don't lose the daily benefits of this duty of meditating on God's providence and don't fail to give God the glory due him next week how to meditate on the providence of God I love the Puritans for their practical nature it's not just this is

our duty but how do we do it are we convinced from scripture we need to be doing it I trust we are at the!

[39 : 41] chapter next chapter how do we do it and he comes back to us with helpful pointers from scripture on how that should be done well may the Lord help us then live in this day with our eyes wide open to his providence and prepare our hearts to worship and praise him even as we're dismissed