

How to Meditate on Providence (part 1)

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[0:00] Our memory verse reminds us just how observant the Lord Jesus was during his time on earth of the providence of God. His Father's ruling providence in the world.

Now, we rush right past many of these wonders that surround us. Clyde Kilby was a C.S. Lewis scholar at Wheaton College, and he had a list of means to mental health.

And one of those means said this, I shall open my eyes and ears once a day, once every day. I shall simply stare at a tree, a flower, a cloud, or a person.

You could get trouble with that last one if you're not careful, but if it's the right person, you know what he's saying. Take time to observe that which God has made and is upholding.

Now, that's good as far as it goes, but the dumb stare of an ox will not do us good. It's a certain kind of stare. It's a certain kind of look that will profit us.

[1:14] Christ did more than stare at the birds. It was more than a passing observation. Oh, look, the sparrows are still alive. No, his observation had added to it meditation.

He not only stopped to look and smell the roses and notice the birds, but he thought about what he observed, and that's the Christ-likeness we need.

We're studying Flavel's mystery of providence. Last week, we came to the duty of meditating on the providence of God, and our lesson this morning is how to meditate on God's providence.

And we see that our Lord meditated as well as observed the providence of God. This is how Flavel begins this chapter on how to meditate.

He says, No, no.

[2:38] It is another kind of work than what most men understand it to be. Oh, that we were but acquainted with this heavenly spiritual exercise. How sweet it would make our lives.

How light it would make our burdens. Ah, sirs, you live estranged from the pleasure of the Christian life while you live in the ignorance or neglect of this duty.

Now, to lead you up to this heavenly, sweet, and profitable exercise, I will beg your attention to the following directions. So, we're getting started at least on this chapter this morning on how to meditate on the providence of God.

The first is get a full view of God's providences concerning you from first to last. A full view. A thorough view.

Flavel says, If a single act of providence can be so ravishing, what would many of them be as they were presented together to your soul at the same time?

[3:48] Or, Kevin, this is for you. If one star is so beautiful to behold, what is the whole constellation of stars? If just one providence holds such benefit, think what many together would be.

So, gather as many as you can. Be thorough in your meditating on the providences of God to you. Go backwards as far as you can, remembering God's works in your lives.

Psalms 77, 11 and 12. Asaph says, I will remember the deeds of the Lord. Yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. Long ago.

I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds. So, it's not just a few that Asaph wants to gather in.

He wants to meditate on all of his works. We're to suck sweetness today out of past providences for us.

[4:51] As Flavel says, Ah, sirs. He likes that phrase, doesn't he? Ah, sirs. He's speaking to his reader. Let me tell you, there is not such a pleasant history for you to read in all the world as the history of your own lives.

You like to read biographies? Flavel is saying there's not a more pleasant history to read than your life. If you would but sit down and record from the beginning hitherto what God has been to you and

done for you, what outbursts of his mercy, faithfulness, and love there have been in all the conditions you have passed through in your journey of life.

So, let your meditations be as full as they can be. Not only wide, thinking back as far as you can go, but also deep.

Kids sing that song, deep and wide. Go deep in your meditations. Flavel says, Don't let your thoughts swim like feathers on the surface of the waters, but sink like lead to the bottom.

For the works of God are pondered by all who delight in them. Psalm 111.2. So, ponder them. Go deep as you think about each providence of God to you.

[6:10] And that's what we found in the Lord Jesus in our memory work. He not only observes that the sparrows are still alive. That's the casual glancing look that Flavel says won't do our souls much good.

He not only observes that they're still alive, but he goes deeper and asks, Why are they alive? Why are they alive? Well, God is caring for them.

He could have known that from the Psalms, that God opens his hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing. And so, he sees the sparrows are alive.

He asks, Why are they alive? He's starting to meditate, you see, more than observe. And God is caring for them.

My father, your father, Christian, is caring for them with an extensive care that reaches to their every fall to the ground. And he's your father. And you're worth far more than these cheap sparrows.

[7:13] And so, his care for you must certainly go far further, farther and deeper than his care for them. Can you see how he's meditating? He's going farther than just, Oh, the sparrows are there.

And so, we see how practical the providences of God toward the sparrows even can be in dealing with things in this life that would otherwise upset us.

Therefore, there's no cause for you to worry, he says. Don't fear. Your father cares for you far more than them. And so, providence, if it will be meditated upon, will reap many benefits.

But you don't get there by a glance. You've got to go deeper. It's meditation that uncovers the comforting treasures of providence. And so, there's some work involved in meditating.

It's a mental exercise and mental energy that must be expended. And that, frankly, is often our problem. We're just lazy. We don't like to think.

[8:18] We don't mind just observing. We do a lot of that, don't we? We don't like to think. Just looking and dumb staring at a box we call TV or something else.

But to meditate and to think, well, that calls for energy. I was reading this week in one of my father's journals. He was 35 years of age and he quotes Thomas Edison.

There is no expedient to which a man will go, will not go, to avoid the real labor of thinking. There's no end to which a man will go to avoid the labor of thinking.

Even Edison saw the lazy streak in us. So, God gave us a mind and no small part of it is to be used in meditating on providence.

So, Flavel shares some thoughts about how to go deeper in our meditations upon providence. He says there are several things to be pondered in one single providence before you can judge its true worth.

[9:23] You look at a providence in your life. Look what God did for me. And you say, well, that's wonderful. But Flavel says, oh, but look again, because you can't really know the value of that providence until you see deeper into it.

So, there are several things to be pondered in each providence. First of all, ponder the timing of his providence. Maybe it was when other comforts were declining in your life.

Or when the need was the greatest. Or when the time was running out. Or when all other options had failed. The precise timing of the deaths of both of my parents.

Made those providences all the more wonderful to me. As I saw how God wove that into my life and my schedule.

The timing of his providence. When merciful providences in your life open the door to other mercies. Is another way to look at a providence.

[10:30] Okay, it's not just a single providence. But maybe this is one of those door providences. That it opened the door to other mercies and kindnesses of God. Maybe it was a new job.

And what a wonderful providence. A new job. But think of all the things that that providence opened the door to in your life.

Maybe giving you more time with your family. More time to serve the Lord. More time for the church. Maybe it provided relationships with new people.

And from those relationships other benefits have come. Watch, he says, for providences in your life. That our door providences that open the door to others.

Like the day Peter was called to follow the Lord Jesus. And be his disciple. What a wonderful providence. Me, a disciple of Jesus for three and a half years. But think what a door that was.

[11 : 28] And what other benefits Peter reaped from that providence. Three and a half years with the Son of God. So look for other connecting mercies to your providence.

Or as you look at your providence. Consider when God uses improbable instruments to meet our needs. To do us good.

So God feeds you. Well, that's a wonderful providence for which he's to be praised. It's not to be belittled. But if he feeds you by ravens. Can you see that it's even all the more wonderful.

When God works by improbable instruments. What's the likelihood of a raven. Sharing his food with an Elijah. And yet that's how God fed Elijah.

Or. The way he used the Philistines to save David. The enemies of Israel. And yet they become. The very.

[12 : 31] Instrument by which. God saves. David from Saul and his men. As they're just about to get him. Saul gets word that the Philistines have attacked. And he withdraws.

Improbable instruments. Or using a cult. To provide. Something as good as a wife. As someone gave testimony in this place.

Yes. Improbable instruments. Or when God turns to our good. What others meant for harm. As Joseph's brothers meant harm to him. And God turned it to good.

Or when Judas for greed. Betrayed the Savior. And. The Jewish leaders for envy. Accused him. And Pilate for fear. Handed him over to be crucified.

What evil. Things they were. And yet God used it. For the salvation. Of millions and millions of people.

[13 : 29] As his son died. On the cross. Maybe some sin. In your life. That the devil ensnared you in. And God used it to wake you up.

And to bring you to repentance. And to a closer walk with God. And to greater carefulness. And greater fruitfulness. In the Christian life. Greater joy in the Lord. He turned to your good.

What the devil meant for your evil. And so benefits. Flow to you. Through that providence. Even your sin. It's as we meditate.

You see upon. God's works in our lives. That we start to uncover. More and more wonders in them. When we think about the goal. Of God's providence. Whatever providence you're looking at.

You can look at the goal. Of God's providence. His goal is to. To do me good. He's working this. Into his. His. Plan. To do me good.

[14 : 27] To make me more like the Savior. Meditating on this sweet.

On this. The end. Sweetens. The bitter providences. To know how they will end. When you see providences. That are given in answer. To your prayers. How that enhances.

The providence. Peter's wondrously. Brought out of prison. But it was in answer. To the prayers. Of the church. Acts chapter 12. When something.

Good happens. In your life. That's reason. To rejoice. But when you see. That was an answer. To my prayers. Yes. It becomes all the more precious. To you.

So. Ask of each providence. Did I pray for this? Did I pray for this? Toward the end of John Bunyan's testimony.

[15 : 26] In grace abounding to the chief of sinners. He lists. Seven abominations. I find to this day. In my heart. And number five. Is to forget to watch.

For what I pray for. Do you find that abomination. In your heart. To this day. So you pray. But you forget to watch.

For what you pray for. And so you miss. The sweetness. Of the answer. When God gives it. When God works. In answer to your prayers. And so.

Ask of the providence. Did I pray for this? Well these are just some of the ways. To go deeper. In meditating upon providence. And.

The things that God does. In your life. And you can see. How considering them. Further enhances. The joy. And the effect. Of God's providences. Upon our hearts.

[16:24] How they magnify. God's grace. His power. His goodness. His faithfulness. So that's the first. Way to meditate. Be thorough. Go deep. In your meditations.

On providence. Now. Now that takes some time. Doesn't it? When might you. Go deeper. In meditating. Upon providence.

Can you think. In your life. When. Might you. Carve out. Some time. To go deeper. In. Meditating. Upon providence.

There. There. All right.

In the midst of trial. To draw along. To draw aside. And to. To meditate. Say it. Okay. Find that.

[17:21] In the psalms. Don't. Don't you find that. In psalms. Directing. His thoughts. Toward the Lord. In the midst. Of the night. Through the watches. Of the night. Thinking about. The providence.

Of God. Anniversaries. Are good times. Another year. Has passed. Can I think. Back over this year. At birthday. And. And go deeper.

What. What. What are the kindnesses. Of another year. Of this blessing. And. And. To unearth. Something more. Of the. The providence. Of God. To you. Jim.

Well. Sometimes. In my case. I'm not. A year back. I can think. Back. This past week. And see. How the Lord. Worked out. Several things. And some. I didn't even bring. To him. In prayer. He just. In his providence.

In his timing. Amen. I had a desire. And took care of it. It's one of the blessings. Of the weekly Sabbath. That God. Is built into.

[18:16] The whole cycle. Of work. From creation. To today. That we get to. Pause. And reflect. We get to stop. And think. We get.

To pull back. From life. And meditate. On life. And meditate. Upon. The God of providence. And to see. How he's worked. In this past week.

That we might go on. Into this. First day. Of the week. With faith. In this God. Of providence. Who has helped us. So. Lay hold. Of the Sabbath day. The day of rest. From labor.

To meditate. And to worship. The God of providence. Well. That's the first way. To go. To meditate. Go deep. Go wide. In your meditations.

Be thorough. A second. Is to connect. Providence. To some scripture. Connect.

[19:09] Providence. To some scripture. In all your observations. Of providence. Flavel says. Consider. What promise. Or precept. Of God. Do they fulfill. Let's turn to.

First Kings. Chapter. Eight. First Kings. Chapter. Eight. We have.

The. The prayer of Solomon. At the dedication. Of the temple. So. What is the providence? It's the completion. Of the temple. No shabby providence. That. And Solomon.

Draws the connection. Between. The providence. This providence. With a past promise. That God made. To his father. David. Verse 24.

You have. Kept. Your promise. To your servant. David. My father. With your mouth. You have promised. And with your hand.

[20:05] You have fulfilled it. As it is. Today. So the completion. Of. The temple. Was the work. Of God's hand. And it was. A wonderful.

Providence. But. Solomon. Sweet. Sucks. Greater sweetness. Out of the providence. By remembering. And reminding. Israel. That this.

Providence. Is the result. Of a. Previous. Promise. What God's mouth.

Said. To my father. David. His hand. Has now. Accomplished. So when you see. The hand of providence. In your life. Look back. To see. If you can see. Something. From his mouth.

That. Would have. Gone. Before it. When we connect. Providence. To a promise. What is it. About God. That we. Appreciate. More of.

[21:02] His faithfulness. Okay. So. So. Here's the completion. Of the temple. Wonderful thing. God is so good. That we have a place. Where he will meet. With us. He the holy one.

Will meet with us. Sinners. What a good God. But by remembering. That this is what God. Had promised to do. They can not only say. What a good God. But what a faithful God. And you can do the same thing.

With your providences. As you see a providence. And you're able to attach it. To a promise. You'll have a greater. A deeper appreciation. For the. Faithfulness. Of God. Look at Joshua.

Chapter 23. In verse 14. We're at the end of Joshua's. Long. Life. Life.

And his. Leadership. Over Israel. As they. Went into the promised land. And claimed it. As their own.

[21 : 58] And now here he is. At the end of life. Looking back. And he's connecting the dots. For Israel. Between God's providence. And God's promises. The providence of God.

Was God fighting for them. They're remembering. The fact that. When we came into this land. And we had enemies. God fought for us. What a wonderful providence.

They're remembering. How that God drove the nations out. Before them. They're remembering. How God gave them. The land of the nations. So these are the providences of God.

But all of this had been promised. And Joshua connects the dots. Verse 14. Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul.

That not one of all the good promises. The Lord your God gave you. Has failed. Every promise. Has been fulfilled. Not one. Has failed.

[22 : 56] You see what he's saying. We're standing. On promised. Land. There's a reason it's called the promised land. Because it was promised to them.

So when they came into it. And they're rejoicing in the providence. He connects them to the promise. That God said would happen.

Many promises. Many providences. They matched. And it gave to Israel. A deeper enjoyment. Of God himself. In the providence. A deeper enjoyment.

Of his trustworthiness. Has God made a promise. Look. He's kept it. Every one of those promises. He kept it. So as you review your promise. Providences. See if you can't connect them.

To some. Word. Of God. Some promise. Maybe you're remembering a time. When God provided for your needs. In a wonderful and timely way. Well rejoice in the Lord for that.

[23 : 54] But ask. Did that fulfill any promise of God? My God will supply all your needs. According to his riches and glory. By Christ Jesus.

Well then rejoice in your providence. As a fulfillment. Of that promise of God. To you. Maybe the Lord helped you through a difficult assignment.

A long trial. An exhausting work. And now you're recognizing God's help. And strength given.

Maybe hosting the GA. Had certain pressures upon you. And difficulties.

And now you're looking back. And you're saying. Oh God helped and strengthened me. Well was that the fulfillment of any promise? Isaiah 41.

Verse 10. Do not fear. For I am with you. Do not be dismayed. For I am your God. I will strengthen you. And help you. I will uphold you. With my righteous right hand.

[24 : 52] So you're. You're enjoying the providence. But now you're enjoying the fact. That God. You promised to help and strengthen me. And you did. And our appreciation.

Of his. His faithfulness to us. In our personal lives. And. Becomes deeper. And greater. Has providence. Not proven God's word.

True to you. That a generous man. Will himself be blessed. That he who enriches others. Will. Himself be enriched. Or he who refreshes others. Will. Himself be refreshed.

As you see that. Connect it to the word of God. And. Go deeper. In your enjoyment of God. The worker of that providence. Maybe the Lord helped you. To speak of Christ.

To a co-worker. This week. Did that fulfill any promise? Did he never. Promise. That you will receive power. For witness. When his Holy Spirit.

[25 : 47] Comes upon you. Could you. Could you connect. The providence. To the promise. How many of. Times. Has God's providence. In your life. Proved. His promise. True.

That he will never leave you. Nor forsake you. And. Yeah. There were times. That you. You doubted. And there were stretches. Along the journey. Where you wondered. If the promises were true.

In your case. Or whether the fountain of grace. Had run dry for you. But as. As Flavel says. But you found at last. That the Lord. Has either strengthened your back.

For the burden. Or lightened your load. So that you could bear it. Or else. Has opened up. An unexpected door. Of escape.

And all. According to that promise. He will not let you. Be tempted beyond. What you were able to bear. So connect. The providence. To the promise.

[26:41] Observe. The relation. Between God's work. In your life. And God's word. His hand. And his mouth. So. Have you ever played that. Matching memory game.

The little. Squares. And the face cards. They're all turned down. And there's two of each. Thing. And so you uncover. You get two picks. And the first pick. Is a red ball. And so you know. Somewhere on that. Group of cards. Is another red ball. But where is it? The guy before. You might have uncovered. But you forget. Where was that? That's what we're doing. God uncovers. A providence. In your life. Now look. For the matching promise. Look. For the matching word. Of God. Because what God's. Word speaks. His hand. Does. Proverbs. In other words. We're learning. To see all of our. Providences. Through the lens.

[27:37] Through the glasses. Of scripture. We're learning. To look at what happens. Through the word of God. Himself. And what he has said.

What he's promised. It may not always be a promise. Maybe it's a precept. Maybe it's a principle. Of scripture. Maybe it's a proverb. But look. For some word of God.

To give. Further explanation. To what it is. That he's done. In your providence. I wonder. If that's not part.

Of the great happiness. Of heaven. Itself. To connect. The dots. In our lives. Between God's. Providences. And his promises. To us.

Will he. Take us. By the hand. And. And. Point out. To us. I was doing. That. In your life. In faithfulness. To this promise. Here. My hand.

[28:35] Did here. In your life. What my mouth. Promised. There. And he will. Connect. The two. For our wonder. For our joy.

For our enjoyment. Of him. Well. It's your comfort. And joy. Now. To begin. To connect. Those dots. As we're able. Granted. There are many times. That we don't have a clue. How those.

Two. Come together. And for that. We wait. But there are times. That. It is our duty. To meditate. And to draw. Those things together.

For the greater glory. Of God. And to do that. And to do that. And to do that. And to do that. Not only with. The encouraging providences. In our lives. The good things.

That God does for us. Connect it to some word of God. Do it as well. With the difficult things. The challenging providences. God's word assures us.

[29:30] That sin. Has consequences. That are negative. Doesn't it? You can't read the Proverbs without seeing that. If you do this, this happens.

If you don't want that to happen, then don't do this. And we see these connections, this cause-effect connections. Flavel says, God assures us that sin is the cause and inlet of affliction and sorrow and that there is an inseparable connection between the two.

In Jeremiah 2.19, God says, your wickedness will punish you. Your backsliding will rebuke you.

Consider then, there's our word meditate, consider then and realize how evil and bitter it is for you when you forsake the Lord your God and have no awe of me, declares the Lord, the Lord Almighty. So when going through some of these bitter consequences of our sin and our backsliding, don't just see the providence for the painful thing it is.

Connect it to the word of God. If you would profit from your providence, the Lord disciplines those he loves and he punishes everyone. He accepts as a son. Endure hardship then as discipline.

[30:51] God is treating you as sons. Make the connection between what's happening in your life and God's word. Again, where that's able. We're not always able to know the causes for things happening, but sometimes we are.

And when we are, we're to make the connection. Proverbs 28.13, He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renouncing them finds mercy.

Has God's providence not proven that true in your life? Both sides. When I concealed my sin, I didn't prosper. Maybe you're in one of those phases right now, and instead of confessing and renouncing your sin, you're concealing it.

You're hiding it. And you're not prospering. You need to connect what's going on in your life with the word of God, the interpretive word of God for your providence. And you've also known that whoever confesses and renounces sin finds mercy.

Make those connections in your life between God's word and God's providence. So let God's providence be enriched by your meditating upon it.

[32:07] Any further comments or questions on this second one? Jim? Well, I was just talking about the promise in the providence. Friday night, I don't know if anybody noticed or not, there was two beautiful rainbows in the eastern sky.

Beautiful rainbows, the promise. Not to destroy the earth by flood again. I had a band-loaded young Amish people. I brought home from a surprise birthday party with just an awe of how the Lord had the sky displayed.

The beautiful rainbows in the eastern sky, how the clouds were stopped and the sun would come out. Friday evening was an awesome evening. There's those two promises.

Okay. So Jim's telling us that the beautiful providence was the double rainbow. I mean, anybody that saw it could appreciate it for what it is, right?

I mean, just, that's pretty. That's amazing. Look at that. But the Christian, meditating, connecting the dots to the promise of God can enjoy it more, can't he?

[33:08] Because he knows that's not just something happening because of scientific understanding of sun, light, and water particles.

No, I know that God has set that bow in the sky as a sign of a covenant that he made. And I can draw comfort from that.

That springtime and harvest, summer, winter, sowing, reaping, will continue on in this world until God's plan is over.

God has assured it. There's not going to be some asteroid hit our planet before God's plan is finished. There's not going to be some way of nuclear holocaust that will end this world before God's prompt.

He's going to see that these rhythms of life and nature continue until he's finished with the redemption of his people that his son came to accomplish.

[34:12] So the Christian cannot enjoy a rainbow, the providence of a rainbow by looking to the promise. I thought you were going to speak of another wonder of God on Friday night, and that was in the skies, and that was the bolts of lightning.

Did any of you see the lightning Friday night? Well, I assume that if you've seen the rainbow, you'll see the rain. We don't assume anything around here, Jim. It's hard to try it when you watch the glory of God and knowing there's been a promise, Pastor.

The lightning slash is his command. Well, there you go. That's a hymn. You've connected the providence to a hymn, but that hymn is based on Scripture. And there's a Scripture that says that the lightning bolts run at his command.

He sends them, and they go on his errands. They do exactly what he sends them. He said it's hard to drive, and I had my son. He's practicing driving.

So he was driving home from Warsaw, and I was just watching the whole way home, and it was a display of wonder. But again, to connect it to the Word of God that interprets the providence makes us to enjoy it.

[35:21] What else? Jackie? Hmm. Amen. Well, thank you. Yes.

33. The end of chapter 33 of Deuteronomy. Very good. So, again, connecting all of life, which is God's providence, whatever happens is God's providence, learning to connect it to His Word.

Anything else? Ed? Well, staying with the storm. All Christians know Romans 8, 28 and 29. Some of our favorite verses.

How would you feel if you're sitting in the last few weeks and seeing your house and all your blood is blown away?

And as a Christian, I would look back at verse 22 in the same chapter, where it says the whole creation is groaning. And that's what we're seeing there in these storms and hurricanes, tornadoes, blizzards.

[36:31] The earth is groaning under the weight of sin, but redemption is coming, not only for us, but for this earth. That's right.

It's a cursed earth. And that's what Romans 8 is reminding us, that it's been subjected to bondage, to decay and frustration, and that because of man's sin.

So again, the Word of God becomes the interpretive Word of the providence and helps us to bow our necks to whatever it is God says, the storm in that case.

Somebody else? Does I see a hand? Roger. Unless a person really values the higher good and purpose God is trying to accomplish in His providence, they may either love that providence or

really become bitter toward God for what He is doing.

So it provides an opportunity for me to examine, do I love the greater purpose that He's trying to accomplish in these providences and that's revealed by how I'm responding.

[37 : 42] And if these meditations are a comfort or there is greater disturbance to me for what they're revealed.

Our hearts are revealed in these things, aren't they? And that was all part of his introductory comment to this chapter. We want more than just a casual glance at providence.

We want our hearts dealt with. We want our hearts to be lifted up, to be exposed, as Roger's saying, to be corrected. Yes, it takes more than just a casual look to see into our hearts' response to providences.

Anything else? Yes, Jeanette? Amen. So we can come at this two ways.

We can come at it through the providence and ask where is the promise or the Word of God attached to this? Or we can come at it through the Scriptures, the Word of God, and come to the Scriptures, which I trust we're doing every day, and ask, where is that seen in my life?

[38 : 49] God says this. And Jeanette's saying, we may not see it in our lives, but by faith we can know that if God says it, then His Word controls His hand.

And so we can come at it from the Word to the providence or from the providence to the Word.

Amen. Well, let's go in the trust, the faith that our Father is this intimately involved in our lives and seek to think more deeply and more thoroughly and biblically about the providences in our lives.

We're dismissed. Thank you.