

How to Meditate on Providence (part 2)

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Preacher: Jon Hueni

[0:00] How to meditate on the providence of God. We saw last week, it's not just those slight glances toward providence where we just say, oh, the birds are alive.

that will do us good, but we need to think, why are the birds alive? It's God who is keeping them and feeding them. And surely if they're just two for a penny, man made in his own image and believers bought with the blood of Christ are far more valuable to him.

And so by thinking deeply and broadly about the providence of God, we find great benefit to our hearts. So that was the first rule, be thorough, go deep, go wide as you think about God's providence in your life.

And secondly, it was match your providence with a word from God. Learn to tie what is happening in your life to some promise of God's word, some precept, some proverb found in the word of God. And that will make our blessings sweeter and our burdens lighter. It will truly enlarge our pleasure in God. Well, the third instruction on how to meditate then on providence, and we picked this up this morning, is to let all your providences lead you to the character of God, to God himself, and namely his nature, his character.

[1:30] We're all familiar, I think, with those common words in Proverbs 3.6, in all your ways, acknowledge him. And that's our aim in this study.

That's what Flavel's been trying to get us to do, is to see God's providence in all your ways, and to acknowledge this is the Lord at work. In all your ways, acknowledge him.

Recognize him. See him, even if it's with the eye of faith, and acknowledge that it is him. So providence is to lead us to God himself.

In all that's happening, I'm to see him. And that's my greatest need throughout my day, because nothing looks the same with God in view. But it's not, again, just a glance at him.

It's rather a thoughtful glance toward God. And so Flavel applies this point to all kinds of providences, and he divides them in two, what we might call good providences and bad providences.

[2:35] I say we might call them that. We just saw that even the bad providences are to work for good for those who love God. But that's how we think of them. Bad providences, good providences.

Or comforting providences and sad and afflictive providences, as Flavel likes to call them. So let's look first at the good, comforting providences in our life, and how they are to lead us to God and something about his character.

2 Corinthians 1.3 says, He's the God of all comfort and the Father of compassions. If someone is the Father of others, it means he's the source of the others.

And so if God's called the Father of compassions, that means he's the source, the fountain of all compassion. So if you have any compassionate, comforting providences in your life, go back to the fountain, the Father of them, to God.

And as you go back to him, don't do it just in a general way. Well, this came from God. But take special notice of particular aspects of his character that are displayed in that providence.

[3:53] What is there about God that is seen in this providence, this comfort in my life? We're wanting to know God better. And to experience him in the whole of life.

And the more you see of God in your providence, the more you'll profit, and the more God will be praised. So what are some things that we can see about God in our providences?

The first is take note of the care of God for you in your comforting providences. His care of you.

Why are we to cast all our cares upon him? Because he cares for you.

He cares for you. That's the reality. So when we see his comforting providences, we're to think of God and how much he cares for us.

Think of his care for you. The world is consumed with things like, what shall we eat? What shall we drink?

[4:52] What shall we wear? Jesus says that's a summary of a lost person's life. Their life is consumed with those kinds of cares of life. But what frees us from worrying and living lives preoccupied with such things?

Jesus says, Your heavenly Father knows that you have need of these. He knows. You mean he cares enough about me to know everything I need?

Yes. Yes. And that's what my providence is to remind me. I have a Father in heaven who cares for me. So let a different preoccupation and priority rule your mind in life.

Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, because you know your Father cares for you. Your home base is covered. He'll take care of you. You don't have to be all about you.

You can be all about him and his kingdom and his righteousness, because you know that all these other things will be added to you as well. Your Father cares for you.

[5:58] His eye is out for your good. Acknowledge his care and your providence. What can I see of God's concern for me in this that has happened? And when you see it, thank him for it and tell others about it.

Do you know how God cares for me? Take note, secondly, of the wisdom of God in the way that he dispenses his mercies to you.

The wisdom of God. Have you ever noticed that when one comfort is cut off and taken away, he often raises up another comfort from a different place?

To replace that or to compensate for that. It was that way in Isaac's life. You read Genesis 23 and it's all about the loss of his mother, Sarah.

A tremendous burden to Isaac in her death. The very next chapter is the addition of a wife for him in Rebecca. The end of that chapter says Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother, Sarah, and he married Rebecca.

[7:04] So she became his wife and he loved her. And Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. Comforted in Rebecca after the loss of his mother, Sarah.

Acknowledge God's wisdom in all of that. He knows the spacing and timing of our comforts. And so when we see it, we're to draw attention to it and worship God and praise him for it.

Take note next of the free grace of God in all your blessings. The free grace of God. That they're given in spite of your unworthiness.

Jacob did this in Genesis 32. You remember he's left his home and he's gone in a far land. And he's found a wife.

And he's headed back home after many, many years. And he's about to face Esau, his brother, that was angry enough to kill him when he last saw him.

[8:09] And as he comes back to the Jordan, he's reentering the promised land. He comes to the Jordan and he's saying, And I had only this staff in my hand when I was when I was coming out.

That was many years ago. And now as I come back, I'm two groups. Remember how he divided all that he had into two groups and sent them scattered out to meet Esau? I had a staff.

Now I've got two groups. I am not worthy of the least of all your mercies or your compassions, he says to God. What is he doing?

He's acknowledging the comforting mercy, the blessing of God. But he's saying, Let me improve that providence by remembering that I don't deserve one of them.

So see the grace of God, the free grace of God in all of your comforts. By our sins against God, we had forfeited every single good thing in our lives.

[9:07] And that will make us to appreciate God more in those comforting providences. So the free grace of God. What other characteristics of God can we note in our providences?

Notice the condescension of God. Stooping to answer your prayers. That's what David did in Psalm 34 and verse 6. This poor man called.

And the Lord heard him. And he saved him out of all his troubles. Flavel says this is the sweetest bit in any enjoyment.

When we see that God has heard and answered our prayers. I'm sure we underestimate that one.

We're so used to God hearing and answering, perhaps, that it no longer shocks us that the king of all the universe, who has the king's hearts in his hands, and who's ruling over everything, down to every sparrow's fall and every hair from your head, that he hears you when you pray and he

answers you.

Draw that out in your providence. When you see a providence and a kindness, a blessing, was that given in answer to prayer? In joy, the condescension of God, that he stoops to listen.

[10:27] And that ought to greatly inflame our love for God. As David says, I love the Lord. Psalm 116.1. I love the Lord because he heard my cry.

He heard my voice. He heard my cry for mercy. So I'll call on him all the days of my life. Well, another thing worth to note in our providences is the design and end of God in all your comforts. Why does God give you good things? Why does he give you blessings? Well, one reason is to quicken you and to enable you to serve him with gladness. God wants you to serve him in prosperous days and in your comforts and blessings with gladness.

Back in Deuteronomy 28. You remember those chapters, Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28. Those were stipulations of the covenant that God made with Israel.

If you remain faithful, these are the blessings that will follow. Blessings upon your womb, upon your sheep, upon your garden, upon your fields, upon the rain clouds.

[11:37] But if you abandon me for idols, these are the evils that will follow. Drought and barrenness and armies coming in and invading the land and destroying you and so on.

So you have this. It's right in the midst of that. And in Deuteronomy 28, 45, these are the curses that will come upon you. Verse 47, because you did not serve the Lord your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity.

When God blesses you with good things and prosperity, he's expecting that that will help you serve him gladly. That his commandments will not be burdensome to you.

They will be a joy to you. Because of the compassion and the kindness that God has shown to you. And so since they didn't use those gifts to serve him joyfully and gladly, therefore in hunger and in thirst and nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies that the Lord sends against you. But the point is, is that the comforting providences in our lives are meant to cause us to serve God with joy. So as you see these comforts, think of God's intention in giving.

[12:55] He wants me to be his happy servant. He doesn't want me with my chin dragging on the ground. Oh, I'm a Christian. Not very happy about it though.

No, he wants us to serve him gladly and with joy. And then remember the way that all of your comforts flow to you through the blood of Jesus Christ. Your comforts were purchased by his sufferings.

That ought to give us pause as we think about them. Wow, these are valuable things. They're things Jesus bought with his own blood. Flavel says, Mercies derive their sweetness from the channel through which they run to us.

And so, as the mercies are flowing to us, the channel that they're coming in actually gives something of its flavor to the mercy. Well, what are the channels of mercy, Christian, coming into your life?

It's the channel of Calvary. It's the cross. And all these good things can come to us because of the blood of Jesus. And that ought to sweeten our enjoyment of them as we acknowledge Christ's suffering and all of our comforting providences.

[14:03] And then, I, the distinguishing goodness of God. Let your comforts show you the way that God has distinguished you to give you those comforts.

The distinguishing goodness of God. Think of how many thousands of believers better than you are denied those comforts.

We're sitting here with the comfort of freedom this morning, aren't we? Nobody's got their eye in the back. Unless Tom does over there or Larry. But nobody's looking to see somebody coming in here with a gun to persecute us.

Why not? We have this blessing, this providence that God has dumped in our laps. Think of the thousands who are better Christians than you and me who don't have that. Think of the distinguishing goodness.

How God has singled you out with that blessing that he hasn't given to everyone else. And it's not just freedom. It's so many of his comforts.

[15:11] And that's what we're reminded of in Hebrews 11. You know, some of the Lord's people faced jeers and flogging. One of you last faced jeers and flogging. While still others were chained and put in prison.

They were stoned. They were sawed in two. They were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins. Destitute. Persecuted. Mistreated.

The world wasn't worthy of them. These were gems of Christians. The world wasn't even worthy to have them. They wandered in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

So, acknowledge the special goodness of God to you. Be humbled by it. God, that you should give me this privilege when you've not given it to everyone. That ought to make you humble under it.

But it also ought to make you thank God for it. But also to pray for those who haven't been given it. It's a way that we can improve our providences.

[16:15] And so we pray for those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. And who are not worshiping freely today like we are. Has God given you the gift of children? You can thank God for that.

And pray for those who haven't been given that gift. And in this way, we can improve the providences of God in our lives.

See your mercies as appointed to refresh you in the way to far greater and better mercies. This is the last one that he has under this category.

So, see all your comforting providences as appointments and gifts of God to refresh you on your way to better and greater things. Things that await you in heaven.

These are just foretastes of what God has prepared for you there. So, see them as that. This is just the down payment for the full thing that's coming. This is the first installment of the life that Jesus has won for me.

[17:21] So, let your comforts just remind you the better ones are coming. We'll keep you for living for the comforts of life. It will enable you to enjoy them, to be humbled by them, to be thankful.

But to not make a life out of them. But to remember my best things are still to come. And these are just meant to encourage me and refresh me until I get there.

So, you can see how God's good providences are never meant to be ends in and of themselves. Where we just fasten on, oh, it's sure great to be free today. It's sure great to have plenty of food and clothing.

No, it's meant to be a mirror that bounces our thoughts to God. Wow, God cares for me. Wow, God's thinking of me. God has distinguished me out from even some of his better Christians and given me this blessing.

God has meant to encourage me along the way and give me joy. And in this way, we get from the gift to the giver.

[18:23] And we enjoy the greater who is the end for all these reasons. We don't make an end of the gift, but we make an end of the giver. Our great end in life.

To know him, to enjoy him, to glorify him. Well, that's for the afflictive providences. Any comments or questions on how we take bad providences?

I'm sorry, the good providences and let them be bouncing trampolines to get us to think about God's character and something about God in those providences.

Anyone like to give a testimony to it or there? Okay, I see. Remember the good ones when you're going through the bad ones.

Lest your heart be overcome with bitterness. Yes, Lou. I would greatly appreciate your response to him. I'm taking my help.

[19:25] Hmm. You can see it again. You can see it over all the things. You can see it over all the things. Hmm. You can see it over all the things. Hmm.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Let it lead you to God. God is thinking of you and knowing you would need such a helper and providing for it.

All right. Anyone else? Don't want to cut you off, but we need to be moving. So the next thing he does is he takes the same thing with the bad providences, the afflictive providences in our life.

How can those direct our thoughts toward God and something about his character? Well, we need to realize that he's the order of all of them, even these bad ones.

They have been traced upon our dial by the son of love, as we sing. When disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it? Amos 3.6. But again, we're not just acknowledging, yes, this bad thing in my life is ultimately ordered by God.

[20:34] But we're to say, what does this teach me about God? What can I learn about God from this providence? And the first thing is to eye the sovereignty of God behind all of your bad

providences.

Eye the sovereignty of God. He's the great universal king. He's infinitely superior to you. He's the uncreated creator. You're his creature. He's from everlasting.

You arrived yesterday. See him as sovereign. He does whatever pleases him in the heavens, the earth, and the sea, and all their depths. He is sovereign.

And as the sovereign God, he has what the Bible calls potter rights over the clay, doesn't he?

Remember that.

He's the potter. We're the clay. Stop and remember. He is God. I'm not. That's what David is saying in Psalm 46. Be still.

[21 : 35] God is saying through David. Be still and know that I am God. I'm not just your buddy. I'm God. I'm the sovereign one who does whatever I please. Remember that in your afflictive providences.

And as the potter who has all rights over the clay, Flavel says, think of this. He might have made us worms or toads.

Teach your children that. When you see a toad. You know, God could have made you a toad. Aren't you glad God didn't make you a toad? This is Flavel.

He might have made us worms or toads. Toads. He might have made us the most miserable of men. And when the miseries of this life were over, He might have damned us to hell and made us miserable forever.

And all this without any wrong to us. After all, He's God.

[22 : 41] We're sinners. And He has potter rights over His clay. And shall this not quiet us, quieten us under the common afflictions of this life?

So, remember in your difficult providence, He's God. He's sovereign. And that will help you and humble you under it. What else should we see about God in our afflictive providences?

Well, see the grace and goodness of God. You say, I thought that was the first part. Now we've shifted into the bad providences. That's right. And in the bad providences, see the grace and goodness of God.

In that very providence. In that very thing that makes you cry. And stay up at night. See the goodness and grace of God. This is Jeremiah in the book of Lamentations.

Remember where Jeremiah is. He's on the inside of the city of Jerusalem. The Babylonians have surrounded it. The city's under siege, which means no food gets in. And that's okay as long as you've got canned goods on the shelf.

[23 : 45] But once it runs out, things get nasty. And they're eating each other in the city. And people are dying. And there are heaps in the streets of dead people.

And it's in that scene. That Jeremiah writes these words. Because of the Lord's great love.

We are not consumed. Amen. Amen. For his compassions never fail. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness.

That wasn't Jeremiah waking up. Oh, what a beautiful morning. And seeing the birds landing on his shoulder. And the sun shining. And everything's fine. That was Jeremiah looking at the scene I just described.

And he sees the compassion, the faithfulness of God. In what? In that providence that they were not completely consumed.

[24 : 43] There were still some alive. Believe it or not. After we'd sinned against God to high heaven. He's so faithful to his covenant to spare a remnant.

And he sees the goodness and grace, the faithfulness of God. In his afflictive providence. Are we? Has the Lord taken some?

He might have taken all. Are we afflicted? It's a mercy that we're not completely destroyed. Even yet, we have many mercies.

Temporal ones even. And far greater spiritual ones. This is the way Paul looks at his bad providences. His afflictive providence.

He sees the goodness of God. Because of what did not happen. In them. So, he's able to write to the Corinthians. In 2 Corinthians 4, 8, and 9. He says, well, we are hard pressed on every side.

[25 : 39] That's not a comforting providence to be in. You feel squished by the pressures of life. Hard pressed. Crushed. How do you find the grace and goodness of God in that, Paul?

Well, we're hard pressed on every side. But not crushed. I'm still here. I'm still breathing. I'm still alive. I haven't been totally crushed.

We're perplexed. I don't understand what God's doing in this. But I'm not in despair. I'm not despairing.

Because God's on my side. And he knows what he's doing. I'm persecuted. How do you find good in that? Well, I'm not abandoned.

Not everybody's against me. My God's for me. I'm struck down. Oh, but he finds something good in what's not happened. He's not been destroyed yet. And so in all these things, we're crushed.

[26 : 42] Or we're not crushed. We're not in despair. We're not abandoned. We're not destroyed. And why? Because God's grace and goodness and faithfulness never fail.

You remember the story of Philip Henry when he was accosted by highway robbers, highway men on the road. Back, I think, in the 17th century.

And he spotted the grace and goodness of God in his afflicted providence. I thank you that I was, though I was robbed of my money. I didn't have much money when they found me.

And I thank you that though they took my money, they didn't beat me. They didn't harm my person. And I thank you that though, that it was I who was robbed and not I who robbed.

So he's able to take a bad providence and to see the goodness and grace of God because of what didn't happen in it. So we lost some, but we didn't lose all.

[27 : 42] We lost money, but not our health. He always finds something of the residual faithfulness and goodness and grace of God that can never be lifted from one of his children.

And then I, the wisdom of God in all your afflictions, in the kind of affliction that he sent. It was this affliction and not that.

In the timing of his affliction, it was now and not then. Or that would have sunk me. The degree of the affliction, it was only so much and no more.

The support that you received under it, that you are not left alone. But upheld. The end to which it moves for your good, not for your ruin.

The need you have for these afflictions. I got just what my heart needed. He gave me just what I needed. I didn't know I needed that. Now I do because that's what he gave me.

[28 : 41] And so, learn to trace out the wisdom of God in your afflictions. And then see the faithfulness of God under your saddest providences.

The faithfulness of God. We've already mentioned it, but David in Psalm 119.75 says, I know, O Lord. Isn't it wonderful those words, I know? We know that in all things God works for the good.

I know, David says. It's a word of experience. I've been through the fire and I know this. It's my testimony. I know. I was once blind and now I see. And here's David giving his testimony.

I know. I know, Lord, that your laws are righteous. And I know that in faithfulness you have afflicted me. So he saw the faithfulness of God and afflicted me.

The Lord will not withhold the rod when we need it. Nor will he forsake his people under the rod when he inflicts it. Flavel says, God would rather hear me groan now than howl forever.

[29 : 45] That's a good way to take the rod in your life. Thank you, God. You'd rather hear me groan now than to howl forever.

He consults our good rather than our ease. This is the great faithfulness of God. So let your afflictive providences lead you to sing, great is thy faithfulness. Then I, the all-sufficiency of God in the day of your affliction.

See that there is enough in him however much he has taken. This is the real test, isn't it?

Do we find in God all that we need? Is he our all in all? Is he our portion? Is he our inheritance? Is that enough? And so in our afflictions we're to recognize again, yes, he is enough.

The fountain of grace, this is what Flavel says, The fountain of grace is as full as ever, though this or that pipe is cut off, which used to convey some of that grace to me.

[30 : 51] So what did I lose? I lost a wife. And oh, how much grace came to me through her. I lost a husband. She was but a channel, though.

And the fullness is still in God. The fullness is still in God. And when all created streams are dry, thy goodness is the same.

May I with this be satisfied and glory in thy name. No good in creatures may be found, but may be found in thee. I must have all things and abound.

If thou be God to me. So I, the all sufficiency of God in the day of affliction. And then lastly, I, the unchangeableness of God in your afflictions.

Whatever the changes in providence. You know, we were going along just fine and all of a sudden the wheels fell off. Change. But remember, whatever changes in providence, there is no change in Jesus.

[31:57] He remains the same yesterday, today, and forever. And that's to comfort us. In the very context in which it's given. Oh, we had such great spiritual leaders and they're gone now.

Well, remember them. Consider the outcome of their life. And imitate their faith. But know this, that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Forever. So I, the unchangeableness of God. God is still what he was before this difficulty happened in my life.

And he's still ready to be my all in all. And these are the ways that meditating upon the afflictive providences of God should lead us to God himself.

And not just in some general way, but to specific aspects of his character. That we might get to know him better. And those who know him. Love him more.

[32:58] And serve him more. Enjoy him more. And that's what he seeks. A deeper walk. With us and him. With nothing between our soul and the Savior.

Anything then on the afflictive providences. Testimonies of, yes, how it taught you something about God. It reveals something more of God's character to you in the afflictions of life.

Any questions or testimonies, comments to that one? Yes, Roger. Anybody else have that problem with your eyesight?

All you can see is you and your bad week and your bad day. And Roger saying one side of his sovereign God. And a God who's in all wisdom over his creation ruling.

And it lifted him completely out of himself. Reminds me of Spurgeon. Spurgeon was known to go through deep depression. And he was in one of those funky fits of depression.

[34:12] And he was walking through his garden one day. And he just thought upon that text in Philippians 2.11. That the Father has exalted him to the highest place.

Philippians 2.9. That was it. Let me finish, Lou. The point was God has exalted him. God has exalted him.

And Spurgeon, with all this going on down here, suddenly had one ray of light. And he saw by faith that Christ was exalted. He's on the throne.

It lifted him out of his depression. He'd been there for weeks. Groveling. And God with one side of himself. We need that. Upward look.

And that's what even our afflictive providences can do. They're saying, look up here, John. Let that draw you heavenward. Anything else?

[35:07] We're not blaming God for the problems of Washington. We're saying God is sovereign over what's going on in Washington. And every lawmaker that uses their authority in a wrong way will have to answer to God one day for their abuse of authority.

But we're saying, thankfully, we've got a God that's bigger than Washington. We've got a God who Christ is exalted on the throne. Our time's up. So we need to be concluded.

And we'll continue on in our study of how to meditate on providence. May the Lord help us this week, whether good or bad, to let the providences bounce us up to thoughts of God himself.