

# Advantages of Meditating on Providence (part 1)

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 16 June 2013

Preacher: Jon Hueni

[0:00] Some visitors, welcome to you. At Grace Fellowship Church, we try to memorize a verse of scripture each week,<sup>1</sup> and we're memorizing verses that have to do with the providence of God, which is the study of this Sunday School series.

So we're in Proverbs 16 and verse 4 this morning, and it says the Lord works out everything. Let's say it together. Proverbs 16, 4.

The Lord works out everything for His own ends. Even the wicked for a day of disaster. More truth on God's providence.

God's most holy, wise, and powerful upholding and controlling of all His creatures in all their actions all of the time. Now what does this verse tell us about the extent of God's providence?

How far does it reach? What's the word say? Everything. Over everything. He works out everything for His own ends. Oh, but surely this doesn't include wicked people and wicked events, does it?

[1:11] And it's almost as if God knew we would ask the question. And He says, Yes, even the wicked for a day of disaster. He knew we'd stumble over that one.

That His providence is so great that not even wicked men in their wicked days of disaster are out from under His control. Even the wicked for a day of disaster.

Even a Pharaoh who would try to eliminate His people by drowning the baby boys. Even a Herod who would try to kill the Messiah by murdering all two-year-old boys and under in the vicinity of Bethlehem.

Even a Judas who would betray Christ and hand Him over to be crucified. Even a Pilate who in order to please the Jews would have Him crucified, though He knew Him to be innocent.

Even a Stalin, a Mao Zedong, a Hitler for a day of disaster. Even evil people who make your life bitter and difficult.

[2:14] They all are made to fulfill His purpose. He works them out and all that they do for His own ends. Whatever their intention is, He makes sure that it works out to fulfill His own ends.

So here we see that God has His own end for everything that happens in life. He has His own purpose. When we talk about the end, we're talking about the goal, the purpose, the aim for which He does everything.

And He works everything out according to His own purpose or end. And He's successful at it. It works out that way every time.

His will is opposed, but never overturned. God's plan for everything never fails. Now here's a God to worship then, isn't it?

A God to trust. A God to rest in. A God to serve. A God to pray to. The God of providence. Last weekend, your elders were down in Warsaw interviewing and hearing the testimonies of those who are wanting to be founding members of Grace Baptist Fellowship when they constitute as a church.

[3:35] And one couple had been converted many years ago now. And as they were reading their Bibles, they couldn't help but see that the Bible says that God is sovereign and that He rules over everything.

And so they went to their pastor. I won't tell you the name of their church, but they went to their pastor and asked him some questions about these things. And he told them, well, there is a church in town where they believe that God is in control of everything.

As if to say, that wouldn't be us, but you know, there are people out there that believe like that. Well, we are one such church that believes that God is in control of everything.

And one of the reasons we believe that is because of Proverbs 16, 4. He works out everything according to his own ends. We can't believe anything else but that God is in control of everything, even the wicked for a day of disaster.

So hide the word of God in your heart. Live on it. Worship upon it as you think of your God in these ways. Well, we're studying John Flavel's book, The Mystery of Providence.

[4:51] And we've been studying the duty of meditating on God's providence, not just throwing a casual glance that way and yeah, God's in control of this. But thinking hard and meditating, considering his gracious rule over all things.

And so Flavel's given us three words of advice in how to meditate on God's providence. First, be thorough. Go wide and go deep. Secondly, connect God's providence to some word of Scripture, some precept, promise, principle of the Word of God.

And as you see that providence in your life spoken of in Scripture, it will give you a fuller appreciation of it. And then thirdly, last week we saw, let providence lead you to God himself. In all your ways, acknowledge him. Some characteristic about God. Some attribute about God. What attribute of God can I see in this providence?

So let connect your providence to some attribute of God. We should be seeing more of God in our life, more of his sovereignty, more of his wisdom, more of his graciousness and love.

[6:07] His faithfulness and goodness, his condescension. Well, now, this morning we see that Flavel's not living on a different planet than ours. Now, he lived in a different generation.

He lived back in the 17th century. We live in the 21st. But it was the same planet. And he knows that we easily neglect to meditate on providence.

And that often all we do is just observe it casually and throw a glance its way. He knows we're busy people. He knows we're mentally lazy people who often would rather do anything than apply ourselves to the work of thinking and meditating.

So he's wanting us to drink this water. And so he salts our oats. He spreads before us the advantages, the benefits of meditating on God's providence.

That seeing the benefits, we might be drawn to meditate upon his providence. Is this the result of meditating on providence?

[7:12] Then let me be found doing it more often. Flavel says, A daily observation and meditation on his providence brings rich benefits.

The first, In this way, we maintain sweet and conscious communion with God from day to day.

Sweet and conscious communion with God from day to day.

And what can compete with fellowship with God? In your presence is fullness of joy. And the more we can spend our day consciously in his presence, communing with him, the more we'll taste of that sweetness and joy of communion with God.

Whom to know is eternal life, Jesus says. Whom to know is eternal life. It's a whole higher quality of life. Not just a quantity of life.

It goes on forever. But it's a qualitative difference. To know God. To experience God in the midst of your life. To commune with God. What can compare with this?

[8:22] Now, we know the joy found in hearing God's words in Scripture. Many verses that connect the word of God with the Christian's joy.

Psalms 19 and verse 8 says, The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart.

But now listen to what Flavel says. Your hearts may be as sweetly refreshed by the works of God's hands as by the words of his mouth.

So you have tasted something of the joy that comes from God's word. He says you can have the same joys in God's works.

Turn to Psalm 92 and verse 4. Again, several verses that we could look to to see this taught.

[9:22] But just Psalm 92 and verse 4. A psalm for the Sabbath day. Here's a good way to spend your Lord's Day. Meditating upon the providence of God.

And this is where we find David. And he says in verse 4. For you make me glad, not by your words now, but by your works, O Lord.

Your deeds, O Lord. I sing for joy at the works of your hands. So we are refreshed.

We are filled with joy. By providence. God's works in our lives. As it brings us to God himself and communion with him.

This is what Roger was referring to last week when he spoke about Psalm 104. It's a psalm of a man meditating on God's works of providence. How he upholds all that he's made.

[10 : 24] The whole vast creation. And he's just observing it all and going from one aspect to another. How the Lord sets the limits on the waters that it cannot pass.

And how he waters his earth, the trees, the grass, the crops. How he provides homes for his animals. How he feeds all of his creatures. But as he's meditating upon God's providential care for his creatures.

It leads him into direct communion with God. He starts talking to God. As he's meditating on God's providence.

And so he says, how many are your works, O Lord. You see the direct address? How many are your works, O Lord. In wisdom, you made them all. The earth is full of your creatures.

And these all look to you to give their food at the proper time. It's direct address. The psalmist is thinking about God's providence in the world.

[11 : 29] And as he does, he starts talking to God. Communing with God. He's rejoicing in the Lord. And it's in direct communion with him. It's like the psalmist does in Psalm 36, 6 and 7.

O Lord, you preserve both man and beast. How priceless is your unfailing love. He's delighting in God's preserving of all his creatures. And tells God how wonderful his unfailing love is.

So as you see God's providence in your life and talk to him about it, you will come into this sweetness of fellowship with God throughout your day. Now, that means then that meditating on providence is not only to lead us to thoughts about God, but is to lead us to actually communion with God.

Those are two different things. Both are good. To be led by his works to thinking about God, that's one thing. But even better is to be led by your meditation to talking to God, communing with God. I can think about you without talking to you. But communion requires communication.

[12 : 51] And there's two parts to communion or communication with God. There's the receiving and the responding. There's the hearing, the listening and the talking.

And that holds for human relationships as well. The same two components in any communion between two rational creatures. There's the give and the take in communion or communication. For instance, good morning, Dale. How are you? Good to see you. We missed you last Sunday. Did you have a good week?

I had a busy week, a few challenges, but the Lord helped me again as he always does. So didn't he spare us in the storm on Wednesday night? How much rain was dumped in your part of the land? How's your garden? How's your hearing? How much rain? Now, Dale's not stuck up. He's just a willing component of this lesson.

[14 : 00] But it illustrates the fact there's no communication going on. A monologue is not communing. It's not fellowshiping. It takes two to commune.

It takes the give and the take. The receiving and the responding for there to be communion. And that's what Flavel is getting at here.

Communion with God has those same two parts. God revealing himself to us. Sometimes it's in his word. Other times it's in providence. In what he's doing in our lives.

He's revealing something about himself. He's communicating truth to us. And then there's our response to it. I trust that we're learning that whenever God speaks to us in his word, we should respond to him.

It's one of the reasons that we seek to have a song at the end of the worship service. God has spoken to us in the preaching of the word. Now, it's only fitting that if he's spoken, we should have a response.

[15 : 05] Either in prayer or song or both or in some way that we should respond to God. Have you ever talked to somebody who doesn't respond? Who does what Dale did?

It's almost offensive, isn't it? Well, when God speaks to us, we ought to respond. Even so with his providence. When he is communicating to us through his providences, and we just sit here like stones.

Something's wrong. It's meant to enhance our communion. There's to be a response to what God is saying, to what God is doing in our lives. So that's what he's talking about in this first point of the advantage of meditating on providence.

We get to be drawn right into communing with God. So think about these two parts of communion with God in these various providences that happen in our lives.

He thinks first of correcting or rebuking providences. And we know something of that. I trust. I trust. I trust. Maybe some idol that I've replaced him with is now crumbling and falling apart.

[16:21] And I'm disappointed. I had set my hope in that thing or that person. And now it's failing me. God's saying something to me in that providence, isn't he?

What's he saying? When I see my idols crumbling in front of me, what's God saying to me? What's he communicating to me? John, what? Me first.

You need to seek me first. My kingdom, my righteousness. Not these other things that the world is running after. What else might he be saying to us? I'm watching my idol crumble.

I'm watching the worm eat the gourd that I was delighting so much in. Well, he's showing me something of his holiness. He's showing me something of his hatred for sin.

The fact that he doesn't want any rivals to my heart. But God is rebuking me. He's correcting me. He's showing his love for me that he's even doing this.

[17:23] But you see, there's information flow in God's providence. We may not always understand everything that God is saying in providence. But there are times when we know that the Lord's hand is heavy upon us.

David knew that, didn't he? What are we to... You see, the providence of something, an idol crumbling, that's just half of the communication.

That's just God's providence saying things to us. Now, what is our response to it be? If we're going to commune with God, we've got to have a response to that.

Well, the Bible says, Heed the rod and him who wields it. In other words, pay attention to it.

Respond to it. And to the one who's holding it.

So in Psalm 32, let's turn back there. In verses 3 and 5, we see David under a rebuking providence in his life.

[18:28] He doesn't spell out for us exactly what this providence was, but it had effects upon his physical constitution. It has to do with his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah.

And he says in verse 3, When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night, your hand was heavy upon me.

My strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Now, that's the rebuking providence in his life. God was doing something to put the heat on him and to push him down. His physical constitution was lagging like a man in the heat of summer is sapped to strength.

Well, what's the response that David made then to God's providence? Then I acknowledge my sin to you and I did not cover up my iniquity. I had been doing that by keeping silent.

But my response was to break that silence and to confess to you. I said, I will confess my transgression to the Lord. And you forgave the guilt of my sin. So do you see how the providence, the rebuking providence in his life, the heavy hand of the Lord upon him, led him to respond in speaking to the Lord.

[19:50] Lord, I've sinned. Lord, have mercy. And you can read Psalm 51 to see the fullness of that speech to the Lord of repentance. Rebuking providence does not only lead us to thoughts about God, but to actual communion with God, to ending the silence with confession and acknowledgement of sin to God.

But then let's consider the other hand, cheerful and encouraging providences. So God is revealing something of his goodness and grace and the largeness of his heart to you. What should your response be to such providences in your life?

Well, Flavel says, Does he lift up our hearts by providence? We should lift him up in our praise and thanksgiving. And so there's Israel.

And they've come to the Red Sea. And they're penned in. Pharaoh's armies. The Red Sea. No way around. No way out. And God opens a way before them, leads them through on dry land, swallows up their enemies.

And now they're looking back at the carcasses floating up on the shore, delivered from bondage in Egypt. And that's the providence.

[21:09] That's the gracious, kind providence. What was their response? Read Exodus 15. It's a song of praise to the Lord. They start singing to the Lord, about the Lord, but also to the Lord.

Your right hand, O Lord, was majestic in power. Your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy. Who among the gods is like you? Majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders.

And so in the same way, God's daily deliverances of you in your life should lead you to a response of joyful praise and thanksgiving to the Lord.

Well, again, you see this twofold communion. God comes to us, not only in his word, but in providence. We respond to both.

It's a two-way street. Right? So, Flavel puts before us other fitting responses that we should have to God's providence in our life. The next one is humility.

[22 : 15] He speaks of humbling ourselves before the Lord. Who am I to receive such good things? The text is 2 Samuel 7, 18. And here, David at last has been established upon the throne of Israel.

He was anointed to be the next king. And then he spent the next 12 years running from Saul's spears. And then he's brought in and he's just made the king of a couple tribes for seven years. And then finally, all the 12 tribes combine in making him king. So, that's happened now. And he's in Jerusalem. And he wants to bring the ark of the covenant.

He brings the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. And now he wants to build a temple, a house for God. And instead, God promises to build a lasting house.

A dynasty of kings for David from his loins. So, David says in 2 Samuel 7, 18.

[23 : 18] Who am I, O sovereign Lord? And what is my family that you have brought me this far? Now, that's the providence of God. Who am I that you took a shepherd boy watching over a few sheep.

And you made him the shepherd of your people Israel. He's humbled by the providence of God.

Verse 19 goes on. And as if this were not enough in your sight, O sovereign Lord.

You've also spoken about the future of the house of your servant. Is this your usual way of dealing with man, O sovereign Lord?

He recognizes this is a distinguishing providence. God is doing something for me. He doesn't do for all men. And he's humbled by it. Not made to boast and be proud about it.

But driven low before the Lord. So, God's providence brought him that far. And his promise held out even more.

[24 : 20] And David's response both to God's providence and God's promise is humility. Who am I that this should be happening to me? Should that not be a response that we have to God's providences in our lives?

Should we not ever be brought to say to the Lord, who am I? Why would you ever treat me with such kindness? And then he speaks of the response of warm love to God.

God does something in providence. And our response should be warm love. Turn to Psalm 18. And the reason we're often turning to the Psalms is because they are David's responses to the providences of God in his life.

His response to what's going on in his life. As well as his response to the word of God. And here in Psalm 18, don't rush over the title.

It holds the providence that David is thinking about when he writes this psalm. What is the providence? Well, it's for the director of music of David, the servant of the Lord. He sang to the Lord the words of this song.

[25 : 28] When the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul, he said. So, what's the providence in David's life?

Deliverance. From Saul's hand, from all of his enemies. So, God communicates to David through his providence such riches and grace. And David's response?

Verse 1. He said, I love you, Lord. I love you, O Lord, my strength. You see the give and take? Providence and response.

Flavel says, every man loves the mercies of God. But a saint loves God for his mercies. I love you, O Lord, my strength.

Yes, I love deliverance. I love the fact that I'm not running from Saul today. I love the fact I'm not running from the Philistines today. You've delivered me from all my enemies.

[26 : 29] But I love you more than deliverance. I love you, O Lord, my strength. You see the response to God's providence. And then there's the response of greater hatred of sin.

Do you remember Moses went into the mountain to speak with God? And he's enjoying fellowship with God up on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights. And when he comes down below, Israel has built a golden calf and is dancing before it.

Remember his response? It was hot anger, wasn't it? Hatred for sin.

He's just come from fellowship with God. And this doesn't match this. He's a holy God. He's a gracious God. And this doesn't belong in his sight.

Now, that was communion with God on top of the mountain. But Flavel says the same response of hatred of sin can be yours in response to God's providences in your lives.

[27 : 35] As you hold communion with God through his providences in life, you too should have this response of greater hatred of sin. And he takes us to Psalm 51.

And he shows David's heart was pierced with a sense of evil, of his own sin, as Nathan held something before him. And what Nathan held before him, if you go back and read in 2 Samuel 12, is how abundantly good God's providence had been to him.

God had heaped all these blessings upon David. And what had David done? He'd gone over here and taken the wife of another man.

And it was the goodness of God that led him to repentance. It was thinking, how good God has been to me. And I would have the audacity to repay him with sin.

And he prays Psalm 51. He's humbled. He's angry at sin. He's turning from it. And again, it's communion with God's goodness in his providence that stokes a greater hatred for sin.

[28 : 53] And then communion with God moves the heart to obey and serve him. When a gracious soul considers what God has done for us, we respond with David.

How can I repay the Lord for all his goodnesses to me? Psalm 116, verse 12. There's this sense of, I can't serve enough.

I can't respond enough in love and service to this God. And that's as we are communing with God. We're receiving his providence. And then we respond with great desire to obey and serve him, to enjoy the cup of salvation that he's given us.

So you see something of the sweet communion that we have with God in the ways of his providence. Flavel says, how much of heaven might be found on earth in this way? As we respond by communion, communication with God.

The end of the day is a good time to commune with God over his providences in your life that day.

The end of the week is a wonderful time to look back over his providences in the past week.

[30 : 02] And so to prepare for the Lord's day as we come together and we sing his praises. It's with a heart that's still brimming with thoughts of what God has done for me in providence this week.

It seems it was the habit of the Lord God to come walking in the garden in the cool of the day to hold fellowship with Adam and Eve. We read of that in Genesis 3.

And I can just see Adam walking with God, rehearsing the providences of the day. Oh Lord, what a day today was. All those animals to name.

They're all so different and marvelous creatures you have made. I was stumped for a while with that hippopotamus, but you helped me. And we got through that one.

But you know, I noticed, Lord, in all of those animals. There was no match for me. There was nothing that answered to my level. Nothing on my level answering to my needs. And I didn't know what you were doing when you put me to sleep.

[31 : 06] But what you brought to me. Oh Lord, how good, how wonderful she is. How perfectly suited to my needs.

Lord, how gracious you are. How kind you are. How creative you are. How beautiful you are. How powerful you are. Communing with God at the end of the day.

As you look back upon providence of that day. I'm sure. After that fateful day. When Adam ate of the forbidden fruit.

The conversation. Was a bit different. But I can't help but believe there was conversation. That Adam was responding.

At last. At last. After God found him out. And confronted him with his sin. And cursed the serpent. And the woman. And him. And yet held out the wonderful promise.

[32 : 04] The coming. Seed. Who would crush the head. Of the serpent. And bring. His seed. Back on his side.

With enmity against Satan. And his side. That there was some response. Oh Lord. What was I thinking? How could I ever.

Respond to your goodness in this way? Oh forgive me. Surely that's. A wonderful way to end the day.

Thinking upon the providence of God. Confessing the sins of the day. Praising God. And enjoying him. For the blessings of the day.

And so going to bed. Not on psalmone. But on communion. With God. Communion. With God. Well. Questions.

[33:04] Comments. Examples in your own life. Of this principle. Of how. Here's the first benefit. Flavel's saying. That we have. For meditating. And observing.

Noting. God's works of providence. In our life. It draws us to commune with God. Any. Any examples of that. Or questions. Comments you have. On this point.

There. They're saying. That there's some of God's providences. That. That. God is saying. To us. You must wait. And our response is. Oh Lord. Give us patience. To endure. To hold on. To keep believing.

To keep going. Now. Is there the only one. Or does. Any of you. Have to wait. Has God ever said. Wait. In his providence. Has his answer been. Wait. Wait. Again.

[34:02] It's the response. Don't just let him say. Wait. No. Respond to him. Thank him. That he is. He's got good purposes. For you. And even in waiting.

Lord. Teach me. Even in this process. Of waiting. What you want me to learn. And you pour out your heart. To this God. That's the Psalms. How long. Oh Lord. How long. Is this going. Am I going to have to wait.

But it's a response. You see. To providence. That's communion. With God. What else? Jason. Every time we sit down.

At the table. We have food on it. As parents. It's a wonderful opportunity. To express. To our children. The goodness of God. And.

Not. Just praying. The punctuary. Prayers. But. To say. As a family. We see your goodness. And I think that. Encourages our children.

[34:57] To see God. At work. In their lives. And God being good. And gracious. And. It. Provides a wonderful. Background. To evangelizing them.

It. Puts a more. A fuller expression. On. Everything. That we're trying to teach them. And. Family worship. And this is what.

It puts. A beautiful background. Background. On. On. Our whole. Education. Raising our children. Excellent. Don't let the.

Goodness of God. The opportunities. To teach your children. About the goodness of God. Slip through your fingers. Draw attention to it. In your prayers. And. Explaining to it.

God. God. So. Worked. And sending rain. On the field. And. Somebody put seed in the ground. And God made it grow. And. And he controlled.

[35:52] Somebody to harvest it. And to ship it. To the store. And. And. We had money. To go to the store. And buy it. And trace it out. For your young children. Say. There's a God. Who. Who controlled.

Every aspect of that. To get this food. To our table. And. So. The opportunity is given. To. Respond as a family. To the goodness of God.

Excellent. All right. Well. This is. This is the real world. We live in. It's a world. That God. Rules over. And. What is the privilege. That we have.

To be. Be a sheep. The sheep of his pasture. So. May we. Find our hearts. Prepared. To.

To enter into. Life. Today. And every day. With this. Idea. That. Our God. Is in control. And as we see him. Doing things in our lives.

[36:44] Let's. Let's let it be a catapult. To communion. With God. Getting to. Know him better. To enjoy his presence. By face to face.

Communion. That he makes possible. For us. Let's pray together. Oh Lord.

When we think of who we are. We are the fallen sons of Adam. We deserve to be cast out. From your presence. Forever and ever. To never again. See your face. Indeed.

That's what hell is. To be. In outer darkness. Shut off from. Any stream of light. Of your mercy. And of your goodness. And yet.

What we find. In the gospel. Is that Jesus. Has. Entered into that darkness. And into that abandonment. For us. That we might be forgiven. Of our sins. And be brought back.

[37:41] Into this. Paradise. Of communion. With you. Fellowship with you. Forgive us Lord. That we. We can go so long. In our days. Without.

Even thinking about you. But even much. Less. Communing with you. Though we end up. Shooting ourselves. On the foot. And cutting off. Our own joy.  
And delight. And pleasure. In you. So teach us. And lead us. Into more communion. With yourself. Not only. In our quiet times.  
But even in our bustle. And busy times. As we. See your hand. At work. Give us help. Recognizing it. And being drawn. Into communion.  
With you. Through it. We ask in Jesus name. Amen.