

Advantages of Meditating on Providence (part 4)

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[0:00] Well, we're looking at the advantages of meditating on the providence of God in our lives. It gives strength to our faith in every emergency and trial to be able to look back and see how the Lord has helped us.

I was reading this morning where David says, Lead me to the rock that is higher than I am, for you have been my refuge. Because you have been my refuge, I can look to you even now when I feel like I'm going under to lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

And then it will endear Jesus Christ to us as we meditate on the providences of God and realize that every good thing that comes to us comes through the funnel of Jesus Christ.

And all of our thanksgivings rise back to Him through the Lord Jesus. And then, thinking on God's providence in our lives, it will thaw the heart and melt it into sweet submission to God to see all that He has done for us, His kind providence in our lives.

And then it guards our inward tranquility and peace in the midst of storms. It enables us to sleep at night because we know that He holds the reins to this world and He controls all that concerns us.

[1:43] Now, we come to two more advantages and then we're moving on to a concluding section where He deals with problems with providence.

So, two more advantages. And this advantage, number eight, is to advance and improve holiness in our hearts and lives. To advance holiness.

As we meditate on the providence of God, as things with us, it works toward our holiness. We think of the ways that God in His controlling of all things, all of His creatures and all their actions at all times, controls things in a way to prevent us from falling into sin.

We thought of that in terms of Abigail. How the Lord brought Abigail to David to prevent him from acting out his revenge against Nabal.

And so to think upon that would prove beneficial to David's holiness. To see how God prevented sin in His works of providence.

[2:52] To see the ways that God hedges up our way with thorns so as to keep us from sin. Hosea 2.6 He sends the Lord in the flesh to Saul, to Paul, to keep him from the sin of pride.

Lest he should be lifted up with arrogance because of his many revelations from God. Now, do you think that God's providence has done nothing in our lives to keep us from being lifted up with pride? Or was that just something that he did for Paul? Was that a unique situation for Paul? Or do you think that it could be that God has been very active in providence in our lives, doing things to keep us from growing proud?

Well, you see, it doesn't always just come to us with a sign on the providence of the day. This is to curb your pride, keep you from pride.

It takes some meditation. And I wonder if we consider just how many providential failures of our attempted plans and desires have been for this very reason.

[4:13] We wanted this, we tried to do that, and it ended in failure. But God was thereby working to provide pride, to walk humbly with him, to keep us low before him.

How many afflictive providences have had this aim in our life? We're mistaken if we think only Paul needed such checks upon pride, and that God actually is that involved in each individual person's life, that he sends such providences to keep us from sin.

He's been more busy in his providential ordering of things in our lives than we know, to prevent our lust from breaking out, to prevent our anger, our laziness, our love of this world, or lack of longing for heaven.

But we need to keep an eye out for these preventive providences, ways that God works to keep us from sin. And as we think about that, did God do this in my life to keep me from sin?

And how that makes me want to live a holy life and do those things that please him. The same is not only true of his preventative providences, but of his corrective providences.

[5:36] God is active in the lives of his people to correct us from our sins. And that promotes our holiness. Let's look to Hebrews chapter 12 and see how the Apostle Paul speaks of the corrective providences of God in his life.

Or not the Apostle Paul. We don't know who wrote Hebrews, but the writer to the Hebrews here does address this matter of disciplinary, correcting providences that are meant to make us grow in holiness.

Hebrews 12. I'm just going to read the section 7 through 11. And notice the role of providence in disciplining providences to promote our holiness.

Endure hardship as discipline. God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you're not disciplined and everyone undergoes discipline, then you're illegitimate children and not true sons.

Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the father of our spirits and live?

[6:52] Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best. But God disciplines us for our good. And what is that good? That we may share in his holiness.

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

And so these painful corrections in our lives and the way that God orders things in our lives are meant to correct us and to cause us to share in his holiness.

holiness. And thinking about that has a distinct effect of helping us to pursue holiness.

Do you remember when David was guilty of the sin of adultery and murder? That he confessed his sin to the Lord. And the Lord says, You will not die, but the sword will never depart from your family.

[7:57] And it first hit the baby, born in lust. And then it hit his son Amnon, who was murdered by his son Absalom, by David's son Absalom.

And then the Lord's son Absalom. And we see his grief at the death of Absalom. Absalom, Absalom.

If only I had died. Instead of you. Was David not thinking back? I mean, when he sees the sword not departing in his family, seeing all this bloodshed in his family, if he's got any bit of meditation on the providence of God, he traces it back to that predictive prophecy that would surely make him hate his sin and to be all the more careful against it.

by meditating on providence and the way God, what is God doing? I've lost the baby. I've lost this son, this son. And he was able to see, yes, God had said, because you have killed another, the sword will not depart from your house.

Flavel says that he has learned from careful observation, from meditating on the providence of God, that it is usual with God, that it is usual with God to strike us in those very things that stole away too much of our love for God.

[9:28] That in his disciplining providences, where does he hit us? He hits us in the very things that have stolen away too much of our love for God. Things that we start to find more delight in than in our God.

And it's his jealousy to recover his first love in our hearts. That's what he wants from us. He wants our love. He wants our hearts. And when he sees our hearts going after other things, one of the ways that he disciplines us in providences may be to strike the thing that we are so in love with. And all to recover our first love for him, which is the greatest commandment, which is the essence of what it means to live a holy life, to love the Lord our God with all our heart and all of our strength and all of our mind and our might.

So that is to our advantage of holiness to be meditating on God's disciplining providences in our lives.

And as we do, it will promote holiness in our lives. And then the last of the benefits is that it will be of great use to us in our dying hour.

[10:44] Meditating on the providence of God will pay us great benefits in our dying hour. Now, in the past year, our family has been brought face to face with our mortality, and with death in a way that no other year of our lives has done.

And it's been good for us. And it yields benefits to us as it reminds us. It is appointed unto man once to die, and after that, the judgment.

There will come a time when it's my time to die. And meditating on the providence of God will help us when it comes our time to die.

Look at Genesis 48. We see Jacob's time has come to die. Genesis 48. And he's gathering his children around him for his last words with them.

We see that in chapter 49. In chapter 48, it's his two grandchildren, Manasseh and Ephraim, with their father Joseph.

[11:47] And so here he is. He's ill. He's on his deathbed. And Jacob's told his son, Joseph has come to him.

And he rallied his strength and sat up on the bed. Verse 3 of Genesis 48. Notice his thinking back upon providence.

Jacob said to Joseph, God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan. And there he blessed me and said to me, I'm going to make you fruitful and will increase your numbers.

I will make you a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you. In verse 7, he looks back upon a sorrow in his life.

As I was returning from Paddan to my sorrow, Rachel died in the land of Canaan while we were still on the way, a little distance from Ephraim. And so I buried her there beside the road to Ephraim.

[12:50] That is Bethlehem. He's talking about losing his wife and the sorrow that that brought.

Then he blessed Joseph, verse 15, and said, May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walk, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the angel who has delivered me from all harm, may he bless these boys.

May they be called by my name in the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly upon the earth. You notice what he's doing.

He's thinking back, and this God has been my shepherd. And he's thinking how he led him all of his life through every trial. The one who delivered me from all harm, the one from whom all blessing flows.

And then over in chapter 49, with all of his sons gathered around him, verse 29 says, Then he gave them these instructions. I am about to be gathered to my people.

Bury me with my fathers. And so on. Where is he to be buried? Well, in that parcel of ground in the promised land. And then verse 33 says, When Joshua was giving instruction to his feet up into the bed, breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

[14:10] What a privilege on your deathbed to be able to look back and to trace out the providences of God all your life.

It seems that that's what Joshua does in his last words as well. He's able to say at the end of his life, in Joshua 23, 14, Now I am about to go the way of all the earth.

That would be the way of death. 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. And so it must be a great benefit for any believer to come to the end of our life and to be able to count the blessings of God, the faithfulness of God, recounting some of the signal providences of his love and provision and protection during our life.

To trace out the ways that he has given us and mercy that will follow us all the days of our life. What peace that gives us to see how God's goodness and mercy has followed us every step of our life as we're now to take this next step, our last step of life.

[15:32] Indeed, out of this life and into the next. Flavel speaks of Satan, the arch enemy of the Christian, and the way he seeks to stir up troubles on a deathbed.

He has no qualms about kicking us when we're down. So it is proven that he may violently assault the Christian on his deathbed with suggestions to doubt God's love, to tell them they're forsaken by God.

And he says, what is it worth in such a day to have a whole story built up from a lifetime of treasuring day by day the things that God has done in our lives?

Be able to peruse them and to strengthen our hearts with the love and faithfulness of God over a lifetime.

This God who has been a tender shepherd to me all my life will not abandon me now on my dying day. Surely goodness and mercy has followed me and I will dwell in the house of the Lord all the

days of my life.

[16:44] This God is our God. He will be our guide even unto death. And so seeing the way he has guided us, he will guide us and we're not done yet, even unto death.

And that remembrance of God's providence is a tremendous aid when it comes our time to die.

Flavel says there's two remarkable acts of faith in the lifetime of any Christian.

We know that the whole journey to heaven is by faith, isn't it? Every day is a walk of faith. Every step is a step of faith. But he says there's two remarkable exercises of faith in the lifetime of every Christian.

One is his first step of faith. Your very first step of faith. When you trusted your entire eternity and salvation into the hands of Jesus Christ.

What a remarkable thing. In fact, it's impossible to man. It's only by the power of the Holy Spirit that we would ever look away from every other hope and trust and say, I'm going to put the matter of my salvation entirely into the hands of Jesus Christ and to leave it there.

[18:01] That's faith. Amazing. The other remarkable exercise of faith is the last step of faith. Intimidation.

Commit my spirit. Not only the words of Jesus on the cross to his father, but the words of Stephen, you remember, as he died. And that is really the act of faith of every believer on the deathbed, that we then take our life, our spirit, and place it into God's hands.

I trust you with my eternity. I trust you as I'm about to step into that realm that I do not, I've never experienced.

I've never been there. What will it be worth in that day as we're ready to launch into that unknown world to be able to see a whole panorama of the providence of God in our lives and what He is who follows us right through and leads us into heaven itself.

So let your daily meditation and study of what God is doing in your life, what did He do today?

[19:22] What did He do this week? Let that be building in you a repertoire, a memory to meet you on your deathbed, to help you strengthen that faith for that final act of committal into God's hands.

So those are some of the benefits of meditating on the providence of God. He shifts gears in this part of his book to go into some of the practical problems with providence.

Before we do, are there any comments on or testimonies to these two last benefits that we've looked at? The way that thinking upon the providence of God in our lives promotes holiness and the way that it helps us when it comes our time to die.

Ed? I couldn't help but think of you to find out anything about God. Thanks, Ed. I'm sure that's been a comfort to you more than once to think back upon.

Such a signal providence of God's intervention for one of His children for their good. Anything else? Jack? Hmm. Amen.

[20:33] Amen. I know he said to me that he sensed that since God saved him seven years ago, as he looks back, he can see how all those seven years God has been preparing him for this.

And it's that looking back. It's that meditating upon how God has led us and now seeing just how God has been. Great comfort in the time of day.

Dan? I'm sitting here this morning thankful for my parents. You know, listening to, just thinking of the permanent consequences for David, knowing he would, that promise of God that the Lord would leave his family.

I'm thankful for him. My dad lost his eyesight before he was converted, before he was married. And they, both my parents, used that as a teaching opportunity.

My brother and I, determined it's a good consequence. He was outside of the Lord. He was serving his own life, going to go on. And they didn't say that to threaten us.

[21:35] They said that to love Jesus. He just did not happen. But he also said that God's proud. That's a proud name of his salvation. He's done something.

Amen. Amen. Yes, there. I think we did. Sarah, the story of the story about the father, is that I think Sarah chose, has such a unique learning experience.

And she needed a very long story. She needed the same teachers. She needed all of us to manage the kids. We wanted something closer to home.

And for a set season, from the day she started, at this little private Christian school, she had three other kids in her class. She had the same four teachers, the same school year.

She had the same administrators. And the only time you get to that school, those four teachers and administrators, they're really there in the system. And he gave her two teachers as parents, too, right?

[22:53] For her school needs. Yeah, Roger. The thing that runs through my mind is the need for wisdom in interpreting the events of life.

When things happen, and of course I ask the question, why? And without real wisdom, I could be coming to the wrong conclusion of why this event is even happening.

And it's the other point. It's been the providence of God as it stands in relationship to our security in Christ and God's acceptance of us in the person of Christ in this sense that when things happen and we conclude, oh, it's because I didn't read my Bible this morning, I didn't pray.

Therefore, God's mad at me and I've got to regain His favor. Well, I've got all the favor I need from God in the person of Christ, so I'm not going to be doing these things to gain better standing with God and better outwork His other's providence.

But there's some other purpose and reason that these things are happening and why I should be doing that. Yeah, I agree.

[24:19] And I think what we've seen in the testimonies is that very often it's as we look back and meditate looking back that we're able to appreciate what God was doing and what were the purposes.

Why did this happen? Why was the mission hired back on and given these benefits and so on? Well, it was only now that that's come to light.

Oh, can you see how God was providing for them? So I think the caution is good. We need to be careful. Providences are very difficult things to interpret. And we may pull down on our head and come to wrong conclusions and pull down on our head guilt.

Oh, something bad happened to me. Does that mean that God is hammering me for some sake? Not necessarily. But we do need to ask the question, don't we? The Bible does say that could be one of the many reasons.

So I think hindsight is 20-20 and it is from hindsight that we're able to really glean more of a sense of the purpose of providence.

[25:30] And hence, that's why Flavel is urging us to meditate on providence. Go back to those things that happened seven years ago, 10 years, 20, 30, 40 years ago.

And think about it again now in the light of all that's happened since then. And as you meditate on providence, you will notice these things and make the connections between dot and dot.

And so it was Flavel in the very language in which he stated. He said that that he had observed.

It was through careful observation that he saw that God struck him often at the very place where his love was being pulled away from God onto other things.

And again, if that keeps happening, you start to say, I think it's safe to draw a conclusion that my heart was wandering away from the Lord and this was the object, this was the thing, the person, the record, whatever it is that was drawing my heart away and the Lord somehow threw a monkey wrench into the works and that keeps happening.

[26:49] I see, yes, he's calling me back and we start to see some of those. But we do need to be very careful with interpreting the providence of God, thinking that we know exactly what God is doing.

We've seen that in the very title of this book, The Mystery of Providence. There is so much darkness that we don't know and heaven will unfold for us. Karen? Amen.

Those are the baselines. I think rather than we'll save for our concluding lesson next week some of the problems, practical problems in connection with the providence of God.

Let me just whet your appetite for the first two. What role does providence play in our discovering the will of God? I wasn't planning on spending much time on that, but that's something that we need to think about in terms of the providence of God.

What role does the way that things are happening in my life, what role does that have in my guidance and understanding the will of God?

[27:58] is the fact that there's a ship heading for Tarshish, that it's God's will for Jonah to go there instead of to Nineveh.

That's the kind of question that we're asking. And then he'll also deal with what, how do we deal with providence when there are delays of providence, providence when we're made to wait for the

promises of God to be fulfilled in our lives?

And I found that to be a very helpful discussion of our, what do we do when we're made to wait?

I would dare venture the guess that everybody here is waiting for something, being made to wait for something, something you really want and you're being made to wait.

That's the question. How do we deal when providence is saying wait, wait, wait? And it often does.

So, next week, God willing. Well, let's thank the Lord for his kind providences in our lives.

[29 : 12] O Lord, when we think about who you are, the Most High God, the God whose glory is exalted above the heavens and the earth, what is man that you're mindful of us?

Who are we that you should, you should be so intimately involved in our lives as to order and to govern and control the things that happen to us day by day.

We do worship you as the God of providence, the God who stoops down to lift us up. We ask you to help us to think about these things, to think back over our lives and looking back.

Teach us, Lord, more of your steadfast love and faithfulness. Show us more of your profound wisdom that has ordered all things for our good.

Humble us at how kind you have been to us in the things that you have kept us from, in the nose nose that you have given to our prayers and the ways that you've denied us of the things that we wanted so badly.

[30 : 24] Teach us to trust you then for this day and for our last day, for that day of judgment when we'll stand before our God.

We pray that you would lead us into a greater knowledge of yourself as we meditate on providence. We thank you then in Jesus' name. Amen.