

Providence: The Hand of God Over Everything

by Charles Leiter | 2017 Fellowship Conference

I've asked brother Kevin from San Antonio to read our Scripture this evening.

Kevin: Well, we're going to read from Psalm 145. "I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds, and I will declare your greatness. They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.

"The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The LORD is good to all, and His mercy is over all that He has made. All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your saints shall bless you. They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom and tell of your power, to make known to the children of man your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

"The LORD is faithful in all His words and kind in all His works. The LORD upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand and you satisfy the desire of every living thing. The LORD is righteous in all His ways and kind in all His works. The LORD is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth. He fulfills the desire of those who fear Him; He also hears their cry and saves them. The LORD preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy. My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD, and let all flesh bless His holy name forever and ever. Amen."

Charles: Amen. Thank you, brother. We're grateful for every single one of you that's here tonight. And I know, having prayed with the men who have spoken before this, that the burden on our hearts has been in part that God would have something for each one of you, and that we would know what to speak on, and that He'd give us His help. And that's what we ask this evening. Let's pray once again before we look into the Word.

Our Father, we pray that You would take us outside of ourselves and give us a glimpse of the Lord Jesus Christ, and give us a glimpse of Your glory. Give us a glimpse of the truth that we're looking at this evening. And we ask that You would do this for Your name's sake and Your glory. Amen.

Lord willing, I'll be speaking to you tonight on the subject of Providence. And I know that some of you are here from churches where you might have heard, at least, part of what I'll be saying tonight, in years past. And if that's the case, I want you to be assured that God, in His providence, wants you to hear this again (any part of it that you hear that might sound familiar to you.) So listen carefully.

The Providence of God. What is providence? If we pronounce the word a little bit differently, we see right off part of what it means. Let's just pronounce it like this: 'provide-ence'. That's really what the word is. It's provide-ence. And the word 'provide' comes from two Latin words: 'pro' - which means 'before', and 'videre' - which means 'to see'. So you say, "Well, it means to see before," and that's sort of right. But it means to look out for. To look out for ahead of time. And the Greek word that's used for providence is 'prónoia' - which means 'to think before'. And if you boil that down, it is 'to take thought beforehand.' So the providence of God has to do with the fact that God is looking out for everything, and taking thought for everything ahead of time.

You get into a hard situation, and God says, "Well, I've already thought of that, and I've made provision for it." Provision - there's another word. You see, vision has to do with seeing, doesn't it? And we're so used to these words. Provision means God saw it ahead of time, and provided. And so, God not only created all things in the past, but He also actively and constantly cares for all things in the present. He upholds all things, and preserves all things, and directs all things, in order that He might ultimately provide for all things.

Beloved, according to the Bible, God is not a far-away God. In fact, the Bible says that "not one sparrow can fall to the ground apart from your heavenly Father". And that is, He has to be right there with that sparrow, before it can fall to the ground. And not only is He present with us and present with His creation, but the Bible actually says that "we are present in Him". Paul says in Acts 17:28, and we read through this without thinking about it much: "For in Him we live, and move." Do you realize that today you've been living and moving in God? "In Him we live, and move, and have our being." So that's how close He is.

Colossians 1:16 says that, "By Him (that is, God the Son) all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." So, in Christ

everything holds together. And then again in Hebrews 1:3, it says that "Christ is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power." So the world cannot hang together on its own; it has to be upheld moment by moment. Creation was never such that it's independent of God. God created, and then He upholds moment by moment, by the word of His power.

We talk about the laws of nature, and we tend to think of nature as sort of running on its own, with God off in the distance. But that is not the way it is. The Bible says that the winds, the rains, the grass growing in the field, the animals getting their food, all of those things, God is actively present and involved. And I just want to read some verses to you; I won't have you look them up I may mention the chapter references; but I want to read these to you This is from Job 36:27, it says, "He draws up the drops of water; they distill rain from the mist, which the clouds pour down; they drip upon man abundantly." So God is drawing up those drops of water for the rain. "Can anyone understand the spreading of the clouds, the thundering of His pavilion? Behold, He spreads His lightning about Him, and He covers the depths of the sea. For by these He judges peoples; He gives food in abundance. He covers His hands with the lightning, and commands it to strike the mark."

There's a website now, where you can watch in real-time, lightning strikes. So you can see a storm in Missouri somewhere, and you can look at that storm and you can see the lights: it'll snap and make a little X, and there's lightning all over the place. In every one of those, God covers His hands with the lightning, and commands it to strike the mark. You see how different that is, than the idea that Nature is doing things on its own? There isn't any such thing.

"He commands it to strike the mark. Its noise (that is, thunder) declares His presence." So when it's thundering, God is present. Job 37: 5-13, "God thunders with His voice wondrously, doing great things which we cannot comprehend." God thunders with His voice. "To the snow He says, 'Fall on the earth,' and to the downpour and the rain, 'Be strong.' He seals the hand of every man, that all men may know His work. Then the beast goes into its lair and remains in its den. Out of the south comes the storm, and out of the north the cold. From the breath of God ice is made, and the expanse of the waters is frozen. Also with moisture He loads the thick cloud; He disperses the cloud of His lightning. It changes direction (now here's the clouds), it changes direction, turning around by His guidance, that it may do whatever He commands it on the face of the inhabited earth. Whether for correction, or for His world, or for lovingkindness, He causes it to happen."

Psalm 104, "He sends forth springs in the valleys." That's why if you see a spring coming up in the valley, God sent that for us. "He waters the mountains

from His upper chambers. He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the labor of man. The trees of the LORD drink their fill, the cedars of Lebanon which He planted." So those cedars, He planted them. So God planted them, and then He waters them.

Psalm 104 again, a little bit later, "O LORD, how many are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all; the earth is full of Your possessions." He talks about the various animals - great and small. He says, "They all wait for You to give them their food in due season. You give to them, they gather it up; You open Your hand and they are satisfied with good. You hide Your face, they are dismayed; You take away their spirit, they expire and return to their dust. You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the ground." And then the Lord Jesus mentions this, doesn't He? Matthew 6:26, "Look at the birds of the air: they do not sow, neither do they reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?"

So God is actively providing for even the plant and animal kingdoms, and in order to do that, He must order and govern all the elements of nature, right down to commanding the lightning where it's gonna strike, to strike the mark. But He does infinitely more than just provide for plants and animals, doesn't He? He not only has to look out for, and take thought beforehand, for plants and animals, He has to take thought beforehand for everything - for every possibility, and every contingency, for all events, for all time and eternity. Isn't that something?

Ephesians 1:11 tells us that "He works all things after the counsel of His own will." God has a counsel. He has a plan. He has a purpose in history, and He's working everything, right down to the smallest so-called "chance events", as part of the fulfilling of that plan. One of the things that makes God God, is that He alone declares the end from the beginning. Isaiah 46, He says, "Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; Calling a bird of prey from the east." (Now if you read in Isaiah, this had to do with the heathen king, and God was calling him to fulfill His purposes.) "Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it." Beloved, God has a plan and a purpose; and every single thing that He has ever purposed, He certainly will bring to pass.

We ought not to use the language, you know, "God is trying to do this or that." He never tries to do anything. Every single thing that He has purposed - it doesn't matter if all the nations of the world rage against Him. Daniel 2:21, "It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings." Acts 17:26, "He made every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth,

having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation." So somebody like Alexander the Great, God already determined how far exactly he would conquer, and how long his kingdom would last. He raises up kings, He puts down kings; He changes the times and the epochs.

Psalm 33:10, "The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart from generation to generation." Isn't that a blessed thought? God has plans in His heart and they never change. They never change from generation to generation. He has plans. He has counsel.

So, what is God's providence? The Westminster Shorter Catechism says this: "God's works of providence are His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures and all their actions." Loraine Boettner said this: "God is no mere spectator of the universe He has made, but is everywhere present and active, the all sustaining ground, and all governing power of all that is. Every raindrop and every snowflake which falls from the cloud, every insect which moves, every plant which grows, every grain of dust which floats in the air, has had certain definite causes and will have certain definite effects. Each is a link in the chain of events, and many of the great events of history have turned on these apparently insignificant things."

I don't know how many of you learned this poem; when I was in grade school we were exposed to it, and I was always fascinated by it long before I became a Christian. But it goes like this: "For want of a nail the shoe was lost. For want of a shoe the horse was lost. For want of a horse the rider was lost. For want of a rider the message was lost. For want of a message the battle was lost. For want of a battle the war was lost. For want of a war the kingdom was lost." And it goes back to that nail that was missing in that horse's shoe. And that's where you'll say, "Well, that couldn't happen." Beloved, all of history hangs on multitudes of things just like that. All of history.

George Washington, in the French and Indian War, he told about what it was like to have bullets whizzing by his head. He could hear the sound, you know; he said it was quite a thing. Think if the bullet had dropped five inches, how different would American history be?

In 1588, the so-called invincible Spanish Armada went against England. Catholic Spain against Protestant England. And the storms came in. Part of the reason [for their defeat] was the storms that came in, that scattered those ships all along the coasts of Ireland and Scotland. There were many homes that were built out of the wrecks of those ships. And Phillip II said, "I can't fight against God." And he was right about that. Think of how different it would have been if England had

became Catholic in 1588. A lot of those missionary biographies over there would not be on the book table. And that related to storms.

Napoleon, in one of his campaigns, he said, "I was defeated by General Mud and General Snow."

In the Great Chicago Fire in 1871, a hundred thousand people lost their homes. And they traced it back to the O'Leary shed. And nobody knows for sure what it is, the story is that Mrs O'Leary's cow kicked over the lantern. But they don't know, they haven't verified that. Someone said they thought maybe it was a spark from a nearby chimney. That's comforting, isn't it? "It wasn't her cow, it was just a spark, a little spark." Another fellow had the theory that somebody set the fire. That's really comforting, too. A hundred thousand people lose their home because some character set a fire. These are the tiniest little events. Think of all the lives. Think of a hundred thousand people losing their homes. Think of the people that went out, and went here and went there; and the guy that got a Bible off somewhere, that wouldn't have gotten that Bible if it hadn't been for that fire; and the people that were converted, and the children that were born, and all the events.

One of the old Puritans said it like this: "Behold, how great a weight of history hangs on such a slender thread of providence." How great a weight of history. And you can see that in your own life. I remember in Kirksville, a girl was trying to swat a fly in her car, and fliplost control and killed her. You see, if God doesn't control a fly flying around, you would have no guarantee of your life at all. I remember one time, years ago, we were heading out for some time away for our anniversary, and I ran a red light. It could very easily have been the end of me. I saw a guy killed on that highway right there, south of our town, blood all over the highway. That could easily have been me. Just one little event.

God has to control everything. He must control everything in order to declare the end from the beginning. I was thinking as we drove down here, every car on the highway, you know, if there was an accident that happened five miles down the road, there's this tree branching out of changed events of history; and on that tree are more trees, and it goes infinite. Every little thing right here tonight, every little thing that takes place, has an infinite string of trees branching off. Isn't that something?

Think of this: God says that the names of the elect were written in the Lamb's book of life from the foundation of the world. Do you realize - no, you don't realize - how many events had to take place in the last thousand years for your parents to get married and you to be born? I mean, you would not have even existed! And God has every name in the book of life from the foundation of the world. He declares the end from the beginning. What a thing this is.

"The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD" (Prov.). David is hiding in a cave, Saul just happens to come in there right at that time, right in the cave where he was hiding. And David said, "The Lord gave you into my hand." He knew it wasn't chance, and he didn't kill Saul.

Well, so much for what we mean by providence. What are some applications? How should this truth of the providence of God affect our lives? First of all, this ought to fill all of us with great humility. Great humility. Everything we have, everything we are, everything we have accomplished - even the fact that you're alive here tonight, sitting here tonight - is hanging from the slenderest thread of God's merciful providence.

You have a strong body? So did Christopher Reeves (Superman), until he got thrown from a horse and became a quadriplegic, who had to be on a breathing apparatus for the rest of his life. You have good eyes? So did Fanny Crosby, till the doctor put the wrong thing in her eyes when she was a little girl, and made her go blind. Are you athletic? So was Joni Eareckson, till she jumped into that water that was too shallow and broke her neck.

Mona and I were in a coma unit a number of years ago, and there was a fellow in there, maybe in his 40s. We said, What happened to him? Well, the wife and husband were out, riding their bikes; and they got tangled up somehow and fell down. They weren't going fast. They were just out for a little bike ride, fell down, and he hit his head on the pavement; and he'd been in a coma ever since. One little chance accident.

You have financial prosperity? There are so many people in human history that thought they had it made, they lost everything just like that. And you could, too. Paul says in 1st Corinthians 4:7, "What do you have that you have not received?" And we might well add to that: "And what have you received that God hasn't sustained moment by moment, or you would have lost it by now?"

So I want to say to you, beloved, what are you tempted to be proud of tonight? You girls, are you tempted to be proud of your beauty? Do you realize you could lose that in a second? Are you proud of how smart you are? One little thing and it can be gone, and you can't even put sentences together. Beloved, we are being upheld by this slender thread of providence all the time. Everything. Everything you have, everything you are! Everything that you've accomplished, it's been accomplished through grace, grace, grace, all along the way; and individual little things that have kept you alive to get you here tonight. If you're not a Christian, don't go out of here without crying out to God. If you are a Christian, God have mercy on you if you've got pride welling up in you. Moment by moment, sustained by unspeakable slender thread of providence.

What else does the doctrine of providence teach us? It ought to fill us with great comfort. Providence ought to fill us with great comfort. Now I say that in spite of the fact that providence can sometimes seem very heartless and cruel. As one brother put it, "Providence will knock you down and kick you in the ribs." And sometimes it'll kick you so hard you think you're going to die. You think it's gonna kill you.

There was a Baptist pastor, Scott Willis, in 1994 he drove over a piece of metal, out on the interstate by Milwaukee. And that piece of metal flipped up and hit his gas tank, and the car exploded. He had six children in the back. Five of them were dead right then, burning up in that inferno. One of them made it out, long enough to say a few words to his dad, and died the next day. All six of them, gone. What? Because of a chance piece of metal. You see what I mean about providence knocking you down? And beloved, church history is full of events like that. You look at some of the stories of hymn writers, it's unbelievable. Seemingly pointless and cruel providences.

A young husband is killed in a moment, leaves behind a grieving wife and a bunch of little children. That happens repeatedly. I know of a young preacher back when I was young, and I heard him preach one time, and I thought, "Men, this guy is such a powerful preacher. What is he going to be as he goes on in life?" Next thing I heard, he had been killed in a coupling accident between two box cars on the rail road. He left everything.

Ecclesiastes 9: 11-12 says this, "I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift." Here's a swift guy, you say, "He'll win." No, you don't know that. "The battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise nor wealth to the discerning, nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all. Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them." Well, that's pretty cynical, but it's often the way it seems. And a lot of these things in Ecclesiastes, you remember, are things described as things that were seen under the sun. And if you're looking at things from that perspective, that's what you're going to see. Things that don't seem to make sense.

I remember stories from my childhood. My dad worked for the railroad, he was a welder. And he told me a story one time. There was a heavy load lifted on a crane, being suspended up in the air. And the men were working there. I don't know how long it had been up there, but it had been up there a while. And one of the men was walking somewhere to get to another job site, and right at that instant the chain broke, and that thing fell and came down right on him, right as he was under it. Time and chance overtake them.

My grandfather told me a story, this is one I never forgot too. There was a thunderstorm; and one of the brothers, as I recall, was right there where my grandfather lived, on the other side of the creek down there. One of the brothers in the family was on his horse, trying to get back into the house; a lightning bolt hit him right in the yard on his way into the house. Dead, just like that. His other brother got on his horse and tried to ride across the creek to get over to tell the folks on this side; and he jumps off his horse, he's running towards the house: bam! another lightning bolt hits him and he's dead. Two brothers. You see what I mean about providence kicking you hard, I mean, taking your breath away? "Like birds trapped in a snare and fish caught in a treacherous net, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them." Men of the world look at that, and they curse God. It says in Revelation, "They gnaw their tongues and blaspheme the God of Heaven for their sorrows and their pains."

Some of you know that poem, *Invictus*, by William Ernest Henley. He says, "Out of the night that covers me, black as the pit from pole to pole, I thank whatever gods may be for my unconquerable soul." He's not trusting in God, you see, the true God. But in the midst of that poem he says, "In the fell clutch of circumstance, I have not winced nor cried aloud. Under the bludgeonings of chance, my head is bloody but unbowed." Now that's the way the world responds - bludgeonings of chance. Think of those two brothers. The bludgeonings of chance. That's all you have if you don't have God. So how can I talk about the comforts of the doctrine of providence? Well, we do have God. And the Lord Jesus did not talk about the bludgeoning of chance. This is what He said: "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet, not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore do not fear: you are of more value than many sparrows." Now there's comfort in that, isn't there?

Look at this. First of all, He's not saying that sparrows never fall to the ground. He didn't say that. If the Bible said Christians didn't have to go through these things, that would leave us in despair. The Bible doesn't say you're not going to have bad things happen to you as a Christian. Okay? The righteous go through the same tragedies as the wicked. But notice what else He's saying. He's saying that when the sparrows do fall to the ground, God is right there. They can't fall, apart from Him. And He doesn't say, "Not a sparrow will fall to the ground apart from the Force." Or, "Not a sparrow will fall to the ground apart from the uncaring, cold Sovereign of the universe." He doesn't say that. He says, "Not a sparrow will fall to the ground apart from YOUR Father." Your Father.

And think of the illustration He uses here - sparrows. "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent?" They're worthless, relatively. One brother talks about *The Forgotten Sparrow*. What is he talking about? Luke 12:6 says it like this: "Are

not five sparrows sold for two cents? And not one of them is forgotten before God." Now do the math on it. "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent?" So how many could you get for two cents? You get four. But the verse says, "Are not five sparrows sold for two cents?" In other words, they're so worthless you could throw in one. And that's the one that God doesn't forget. And that's the one that can't fall to the ground apart from your Father. The one that men don't even care about, they don't even charge enough to cover.

And then fourthly, He says, "The very hairs of your head are all numbered." And that means more than just God knows how many hairs are on your head. He knew how many hairs were on Hitler's head. I'm just talking about special care and concern.

I like this passage, Luke 21 says, "You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death, and you will be hated by all on account of My name." Now listen to this: "Yet not a hair of your head will perish." They'll kill you, but not a hair of your head will perish. What is He saying? He is saying that if you're a child of God, nothing, absolutely nothing, not even one hair, nothing can happen to you. Nothing can just "happen" to you. Nothing can happen to you! Don't talk to me about the bludgeonings of chance for a Christian, never. Don't even let that thought enter your mind. Nothing can happen to you.

Hard providences don't prove that God is not with you. Look at Job. There's great comfort for the Christian in the providence of God. Things don't happen by chance; they come from the hand of an all-loving, all-wise heavenly Father. We're told in Lamentations 3 that, "He does not afflict willingly or grieve the sons of men." That's encouraging, isn't it? God doesn't afflict willingly. It's not the idea that God just delights in the idea of making you suffer. He would rather not, let's put it that way. He doesn't do it willingly. He has some higher thing that can only be accomplished in that way. Isn't that something? "If He causes grief, then He will have compassion according to His abundant lovingkindness." Those are wonderful words, aren't they? Compassion and abundant lovingkindness.

Which of you fathers, if your child asks him for an egg, he says, "Here, son," and gives him a scorpion? That's not the way God is. We sang that song, I think, today or yesterday: "Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take. The clouds you so much dread are big with mercy, and will break with blessing on your head. Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace. Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face. His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour. The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower."

Well, the doctrine of God's providence ought to fill us with comfort. What else? It ought to fill us with great gratitude. Great gratitude. Humility, comfort,

gratitude. Why? Well, as Spurgeon said, because for the Christian, providence is the handmaid of grace. Just think of the woman at the well. She just happened to come out there to the well when the One Person in all the world, who could give her living water, was sitting there by the well. What a thing. It makes you wonder, why did she just happen to go out right then? Maybe she planned to go out an hour earlier but, you know, she dropped something and broke it, or something like that, we don't know. Her eternity was in the balance and she just happened to come out to the well at the right time. And every Christian can look back with unspeakable gratitude at the kind providences of God in his life.

John Newton, before he became a Christian, he was onboard ship, you know, he was a sailor. They were in a storm; he started up the ladder, the captain said, "John, go back and get a knife." He got off the ladder, turned around, another guy went up - wham! - a wave took that guy right off and he was gone. So John Newton says, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound. 'Twas grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me Home."

Ira Sankey was Moody's singer. The story is told, and I try to verify it enough so that I can tell at least part of it. He was on a river boat after the war, Christmas of 1876, a river boat on the Delaware River. And they found out that he was aboard (he was a famous person). They said, "Mr Sankey, will you sing for us?" And he decided to sing "Savior, Like a Shepherd, Lead Us." I believe that's right. And he stood there in the moonlight, singing that song. And after he got done a fellow came up and said, "Mr Sankey, did you serve in the Union Army?" He said, "Yes, I did." "Did you serve over in such and such area?" "Yes, I did." "Well, was it in so and so years, time period?" "Yeah." "Were you doing picket duty one moonlit night?" He said, "Yeah I was, I remember that." And he said, "I was a confederate soldier, and I had you in my sights, I was ready to shoot you. And you started singing, you started singing that song. And I thought, well I'll let him finish before I kill him." And by the time he got over, he couldn't do it. And then he hears him singing the same song in the moonlight on the river boat, and he realized, "That's the guy!"

You realize, he's out there singing, with death just staring right at him. Every Christian should look back with unspeakable gratitude on the providence, the kind providence of God in his life. I mean, you remember Amy Carmichael, who was a missionary to India, she was born with brown eyes. And as a girl she wanted so much to have blue eyes. She prayed that God would give her blue eyes. He never did. But if she'd had blue eyes, she couldn't have been used to go into those Hindu temples and rescue those girls; because she could make her skin brown but she would never have been able to do anything with her eyes, and she would have never gotten in. All part of God's providence.

In your own life, think of the events prior to your conversion. I remember when I was a boy, a fishing trip that I didn't get to go on, I felt so bad about it. And my grandparents that I would have gone with, had a terrible wreck. They were in the hospital for weeks. I would probably have been killed. And my mother said to me at the time, "Maybe God has a purpose for your life." I almost drowned a year before I was converted. I'm not telling you things that you don't know, that haven't happened to you. They've happened to you, too.

After you become a Christian, think of the providences, the kind providences. First year of college, first class of college, 7:30 AM, English class. The teacher said, "I want to learn your names, so I'm gonna put you in alphabetical order. Here's H, I, J, Jennings, Bob Jennings, that's J, and then L, Leiter." First class. Every Christian ought to look back with unspeakable gratitude on the providence of God.

I went out for a walk one night, after I had moved to Kirksville, still single at the time. I went out to pray, and I went a different direction totally and much further than I would have normally gone. And I was walking along and saw a group of Christians over here in a circle, in a yard, singing hymns; and I was on the other side of the street. And somehow the thought just went through my mind, "And He passed by on the other side." And I thought, "I don't want to do that, I'll just go over there and sit down by those Christians. They're probably a bunch of weirdos but..." [Laughter]. And I went over there and sat down with them; and I met a man and his wife, who has been a deacon in our church (a lot of you would know them) for forty years now. And a lot of different marriages have taken place, and all kinds of things. The providence of God. Think if I had walked down a different street, how different [it would have been].

Mona and I were ready to get married, we didn't have any money. We had no money to buy her wedding dress, so she wanted to try to get some material. And a friend of hers came by, that she really didn't know very well, and really she's lost contact with her totally since then. But she came by, they were talking, and she said something about buying a dress. And Mona said, "I'm gonna have a lady in the church make one." She said, "Oh well, I bought the material for my dress and I didn't use it. I ended up buying a dress. I'll give you that material." And she wasn't trying to be picky or anything, but she said, "That's really kind, but I had such and such material in mind." Kind of a pearl color or something. And the lady said, "Well, that's what it is." [Laughter]. So she gives her the material, and the lady in her church is making the dress. And it gets down to the very end - this was a designer fabric company in Kansas City; right down at the very end, there was a little label that was sewed in from the fabric company. The seamstress pulls it out - "LEITER".

Postmarks my name, and sews it in. LEITER - designer fabric company that none of us knew existed. I never had heard my name before except for me.

Just little tokens, God says, "You know, I know how many hairs are on your head." Now that's true for you, if you're a child of God. He's talking about care. He's not talking about bare knowledge, He's talking about care. You say, "You don't know how many hard things have happened to me." We talked about that, didn't we? Can't you say, as you look back and remember all the ways the Lord has led you, can't you say, like David did, "The lines fallen unto me in pleasant places." God has been so kind.

Fourthly, the providence of God ought to fill us with confidence. Why confidence? Well, because God is in control of everything, and nothing can thwart His purposes. He said, "Truly I have spoken, truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it." I love that account in 1st Kings about a certain man, who drew a bow at random, and struck the king of Israel between the joints of the armor. Now you could stand there all day shooting arrows at him, aiming between the joints of his armor, and never hit it. And he didn't even know, he just shot at random. You see, God had told Ahab he's going to die in that battle, and he said, "Well I'm not, I'm gonna disguise myself." That doesn't work very well, does it, when you're dealing with God.

But the thing that's so wonderful about this account is that Elijah had told him earlier. He said, "In the place where the dogs licked Naboth's blood," you remember, he had Naboth killed in order to get his vineyard. And Elijah said, "In the place where the dogs licked Naboth's blood they're gonna lick your blood." And Ahab wasn't very smart, but he was smart enough to know that that couldn't happen; because Samaria is something like 80 miles away, if you look on a Bible map. So it's either gonna be Elijah or Micaiah, one of these guys is wrong. They're both prophets of the LORD, one of them is wrong; because Micaiah says, "You're gonna die here," and Elijah says, "They're gonna lick your blood here." And he scoffs at it, he said, "Probably neither one of them is right." But what happened? The arrow hit him between the joints of the armor, and he stood in that chariot and bled out all day. They took the chariot back down and washed it at the pool in Samaria. And the dogs licked his blood, down in Samaria, where they had licked the blood of Naboth. And what does it say? It says, "The dogs licked up his blood, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke."

I say, the doctrine of God's providence ought to fill us with great confidence. You read the book of Esther, the whole Jewish nation is on the brink of destruction. And what does it say? The king couldn't sleep that night. And he asked for a book to be read, and they read in there about Mordecai, and all of those things unfolded

that preserved the Jewish nation. "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes."

A lot of you are too young to remember the Missile Crisis in 1962. But Khrushchev had actually put nuclear warheads down in Cuba. And there came a stand-off; it was the closest to nuclear war that we ever came. I remember a girl that I knew, whose dad was in the military. She was standing out on the playground. I was in grade school, later grades; and she was almost in tears. Khrushchev, after everything passed and he wrote his memorial, he was dealing with his advisers, there in the Kremlin; and he said, "I said to them, 'hundreds of millions of people are going to die,' and they didn't care. They said, 'We don't want to lose face with Red China.'" And so it looked like God spared a nuclear holocaust from one man having enough common grace and sense not to press the button.

But then I found out later, more information were actually closer than that. There was a submarine over here that was loaded with nuclear torpedoes, and the US actually dropped depth charges; not big ones, but like hand grenade size. But they dropped depth charges, and they found out later that the commander of that submarine armed the nuclear weapons and was given the order to fire. But there was a rule that three commanding officers had to agree, and two out of three agreed. There was one man, if you want to know, (you can't thank him because it's God in His providence), his name is Vasili Arkhipov. And he didn't have peace about doing that. Isn't that amazing? The whole world, you know, all these holocaust scenerios, hinging on one man there. Because if they had deployed a nuclear weapon, it would have happened.

We can have confidence in God because of providence. Number five, we're almost done. The doctrine of God's providence ought to cause us to pray. Why is that? Well, because we know from the doctrine of providence, that God has the power to answer our prayers no matter what. He can do anything. And you might say, "Well, if God has everything planned out, then there's no need to pray. It's all gonna happen anyway." That misses the point, doesn't it? because He has everything planned out, including the prayers that are gonna be prayed that He's going to answer.

You see, there are prayers that God has answered through a series of providences that took place before the prayer was ever prayed. And those providences took place, before the prayer was ever prayed, in light of God's certain purpose and plan that the prayer would be prayed. And when it was prayed, He answered it. He's in control of all of it. Beloved, the fact is that God has set things up so that, in general, He will not answer if we don't ask. Now that's just reality. James says that, doesn't he? "You have not because you ask not."

Just one example. God prophesies through Jeremiah that people would be in captivity for 70 years. As the time draws near, Daniel reads that in the prophecy of Jeremiah; and Daniel says, "Well, no need to pray, it's already certain." It wasn't it, did he? "I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes." Because he reads that God's gonna do this. In other words, God said He would do this, so we need to get to praying. He's able to do this, so we need to pray.

And then, lastly, the doctrine of God's providence ought to fill us with worship, praise, and adoration. And that's why I had brother Kevin read this psalm. "I will extol Thee, my God and King, and bless Thy name forever and ever. Every day I will bless you, and so on..." And he goes on and talks about God sustaining all who're falling and raising up all who're bowed down. "The eyes of all look to You, and You give them their food in due time. You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing, and so on..." May God help us to respond rightly.

The day that we were getting ready to pack up all those books, we rented a 5 by 8 trailer. And I went there, and the fellow that knew what to do had been called away by a toothache. And the fellow that was left behind didn't know how to read the first page. I knew I was in trouble when he turned on the computer and looked at the screen, the first page, for about three or four minutes. An an hour later, I'm finally to the point of getting the paper signed and getting it paid for. And this impatience starts to rise up. And then you know what happened? It dawned on me, I'm getting ready to go down and speak about Providence [Laughter]. I mean, these things are wonderful in theory, aren't they? But we're gonna face it. We'll face it tonight, we'll face it tomorrow. And if you stop and think, you know, God is in control. He's got purposes. Who knows what's going on?

Elizabeth Elliot had that account of the girl who had the contacts, maybe some of you read that. She was doing rock climbing and the rope popped her eye, and the contact popped out and fell down the cliff. And they finally finished their climb and got down, and she's praying, "O Lord, please, I know You know where it is." And some other person there that was getting ready to climb, said, "Look at this ant! This ant's carrying a contact." [Laughter]. Her dad was a cartoonist, and he did a little cartoon of an ant carrying a contact. And the ant is saying, "Lord, I don't know why You want me to carry this. [Laughter]. It's heavy, and I can't eat it; what am I doing?" [Laughter]. But you know what, a lot of times we're carrying things that we don't know why in the world God wants us to carry that. But you can be sure of this: He has a reason! And someday, maybe we'll get a little glimpse of what it is. I mean, I can picture an eternity - I'd say, right here in this group, we could

spend about 100,000 years telling providences. Don't you think? Especially if you start to see into some of them that we don't even know about, that are happening all the time.

Well let's sing one more hymn.