

# THE GOD OF PROVIDENCE

**+** **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

The Lord, through His providential work in creation, holds all things together, rules over all, and provides all that is needed.

**+** **BACKGROUND PASSAGES:**

Psalm 103; Matthew 5–7; Colossians 1

**+** **SETTING:**

In the wake of the flood and the scattering of humanity at the Tower of Babylon (or Babel), God's plans seem to be struggling, if not failing. His image-bearers largely reject His sovereign and benevolent rule. But things are not as they seem, for God continues to hold all things together and works in His creation and creatures to accomplish His will. God demonstrated this by calling Abraham and making a covenant with him and his descendants to bless the world. In spite of human sin, and often through it, God providentially took care of His people and worked all things for His glory and our good.

# DAY 1

## READ:

**Matthew 5–7**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Matthew 6:25-34**

## NOTES



### ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #30: GOD'S PROVIDENCE

Providence refers to God's continuing work and involvement in His creation. This includes, in various degrees, God's preservation of the created order, His governance, and His care for His people (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3; Gen. 8:21-22). Christians believe the world, and even the cosmos itself, is contingent upon God, incapable of existing apart from Him. Christians also believe in God's personal and direct intervention in the world—as opposed to a hands-off approach to creation—that affects not only the natural order but also the individuals and events within human history.

If you've ever bought or rented a home, you know that there are certain requirements to keep up the property. Homes need regular maintenance, like changing air filters or lawn care. But homes may also need emergency repairs for problems such as a burst water pipe or a failing air conditioner. As the owner or renter, it is your job to identify and notice these issues, which can be overwhelming.

We often think about our lives this way, don't we? It doesn't matter if we're talking about an aspect of our home, our work and family lives, or our standing before God Himself. If it appears to be broken, it's up to us to repair it. If it's in working order, it's up to us to maintain it. After all, if we don't, who will?

But the truth of God's providence undercuts this impulse. God creates and sustains all things—He is in control, not us. He repairs what we cannot; He maintains all that is beyond our ability. And through Christ and the Holy Spirit, we have grace and mercy that flow from Him, not from ourselves. As God's image-bearers, we are called to be obedient and good stewards; we are called to be faithful with what God gives us. But we are not called to be in control. When we confuse faithfulness with control, we try to take providence into our own hands with disastrous results (Gen. 3:1-7). We are not meant for that. And God, in His grace and mercy, did not put that burden upon us. God is in control, and we are not.

This might be the best news you hear all day.

**In what ways do you try to take God's providence into your own hands?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

Psalm 103

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 103:15-19

## NOTES

The popular drama series *The Crown* chronicles the lives of the British royal family. Though many scenes and storylines are clearly exaggerated for effect, there is no doubt that the British royal family has had its fair share of scandals. Queen Elizabeth II is often seen as the prototypical monarch, but her throne is often seen as nothing more than pageantry and a symbol—her power over the Commonwealth and even her own family is limited.

When we speak of God and His kingdom, we speak of a King who is in complete control. Beyond acting outside of His nature and character, God's power is unlimited and His authority unchallengeable. Whereas the scandals that rock the British royal family are shocking and sometimes irredeemable, the greatest scandal in God's kingdom is not brazen sin but the grace and mercy He shows to sinners.

We are not God's robots, so He doesn't force us to obey in perfect automation, but in His providence He saves us, renews us, and promises one day to make all things new. God's kingdom is not in disarray; rather, God's kingdom is perfect and presently overtaking the evil in this fallen, wicked kingdom on earth.

As sin ravages our hearts and the world around us, we have a King who is not merely a symbol. He is never surprised, and He is not disengaged. He is present with us—going so far as to become like us in our weakness in the person of His Son (Heb. 4:15)—and He is powerful to save.

**How does God's providence shape your view of God's power and promises?**

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Be persuaded to this by Christ, the Good Counselor who loves you. He became poor for us so that He might make us rich through His poverty, and 'gave Himself a ransom for all.'"<sup>1</sup>

-Basil of Caesarea  
(c. 330-379)

# DAY 3

## READ:

**Ecclesiastes 12**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Ecclesiastes 12:13-14**

NOTES

There is a well-known quip that goes something like this: “Don’t worship your belongings. You never see a hearse pulling a U-Haul!” Similarly, Ecclesiastes is one long, Spirit-inspired essay on the same point: You will toil all of your life to gratify your desires and accumulate wealth only to die and leave it behind. While the U-Haul illustration is humorous yet instructive, Ecclesiastes paints a grimmer picture. But as grim as Ecclesiastes might seem, the book’s author, likely Solomon, did not end on a note of hopelessness. Instead, he ended with a clear word of truth: We were made to fear God and keep His commands (Eccl. 12:13).

To take God’s providence seriously means to understand that He provides all that we need in this life. Everything comes from Him—our clothes, our meals, our income, our homes, even the breath we just took. When we stop and consider everything in our lives, everything that we see as belonging to us, it should give us pause because it means that our lives are not trivial. The God who made everything gives us everything we need at every moment. And if He does this, it means that our lives in this fallen world are not the end of our stories nor truly even the main point of our existence—God is.

Our possessions here are momentary gifts to be stewarded. It is not our job to accumulate wealth but to use our wealth—to whatever degree it exists—to bless others. The posture of sacrifice and self-giving is, after all, the posture of Christ Himself (Phil. 2:5-11).

**What is one way you can be more generous as a result of trusting God’s providence?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

Colossians 1

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Colossians 1:15-17

NOTES

Under the right lens, you can see the tiniest bits of creation itself that are invisible to the naked eye—radiation, electromagnetic waves, bacteria, etc. Though we so often focus on the things seen, we forget the things that are unseen, both physically and spiritually.

Physically, we can easily forget that creation itself is far bigger than we can imagine—the galaxies and stars we cannot reach and can barely see—and much smaller than we can imagine—subatomic particles and microscopic organisms. God’s creation is vast and intricate, wide and deep. In all of this, we know that God providentially holds it all together. As Abraham Kuyper famously said, “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’”<sup>2</sup>

Spiritually, the author of Hebrews reminds us that there is a reality only perceived through faith (Heb. 11:1). With the ability to see the vastness and depth of creation with man-made instruments such as microscopes and telescopes, we are tempted to think that our ability to see the physically unseen means we have figured out creation. God, however, cannot be put in a petri dish. We cannot examine Him and control Him; we cannot create a microscope strong enough to see Him with our eyes. Instead, we are given His Spirit that we might know Him and His wisdom (1 Cor. 2:12-16).

God’s providence is both physical and spiritual because His creation spans everything that there is. One day, in the new heaven and new earth, God will reunite and renew the physical and the spiritual, bringing heaven and earth together under His perfect rule (1 Cor. 15; Rev. 21–22).

**How does the vastness and depth of creation remind you of the physical and spiritual power of God’s providence?**

# DAY 5

## READ:

2 Corinthians 4

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

## NOTES

For many, suffering and trials are something to be avoided, a byproduct of our fallen universe at best and the punishment of God at worst. When we think of God's providence, we are faced with a question: If God is good and He is in control of all things, then what do we make of suffering? Does its existence mean that God is really not in control? Or perhaps worse, is God able to stop the suffering but simply doesn't care about our pain?

And what about sin? Why did God allow sin to come into the world in the first place? Why does God allow its continued existence? We don't have all the answers to these questions. But we do know this: Scripture affirms that God does not sin, that He hates sin, and one day He will eradicate sin. Indeed, God hates sin so much that He sent His only Son to die on a cross and rise again to defeat sin and the death it brings. The incarnation of the Son shows that God cares about our suffering and about the trials associated with this fallen world.

Paul tells us in Romans 5:1-5 that suffering ultimately builds up our faith. Hebrews 12:3-11 tells us that God is a good Father who doesn't stand by passively while we suffer but instead uses suffering as a means of discipline to draw us to Him. God's providence in these passages reminds us that our suffering and trials are not mistakes. They are certainly a consequence of sin's effects on the world, but they're not random byproducts of a broken universe. Instead, God allows momentary afflictions to build in us the hope and expectation of future glory, when sin and death are no more (2 Cor. 4:17).

**What suffering or trials are you currently facing, and in what ways can you fight for hope in God's providence?**

# GROUP

NOTES

## POINT 1: The Lord's hand holds together all of creation (Col. 1:15-17).

Jesus Christ is the \_\_\_\_\_ Son of God, \_\_\_\_\_ image of the invisible God. To look at Jesus is to see God Himself.

**?** How should we read the Bible in light of the fact that Jesus is God?

Because Jesus is God, the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of all things by His divine power, our salvation is sure and our hope is secure.

**?** How can we show that Jesus is our foundation in life?

## POINT 2: The Lord's hand rules over all in righteousness (Ps. 103:15-19).

Because of \_\_\_\_\_, all of humanity faces \_\_\_\_\_. We are fragile, finite, and broken people who deserve eternal judgment.

**?** What are some ways human beings run from their mortality?

The solution to our mortality and judgment cannot come from ourselves but must come from Jesus, who \_\_\_\_\_ in heaven, who \_\_\_\_\_ us, and who fulfilled all \_\_\_\_\_ on our behalf.

## POINT 3: The Lord's hand provides what we need (Matt. 6:25-34).

God knows what is \_\_\_\_\_. In wealth or poverty, God is working a plan for your \_\_\_\_\_ and His \_\_\_\_\_.

### VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"As this all-wise, all-gracious Being created all things, so he sustains all things. He is the Preserver as well as the Creator of everything that exists."<sup>3</sup>

-John Wesley (1703-1791)

## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #30: GOD'S PROVIDENCE

Providence refers to God's continuing work and involvement in His creation. This includes, in various degrees, God's preservation of the created order, His governance, and His \_\_\_\_\_ for His people (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3; Gen. 8:21-22). Christians believe the world, and even the cosmos itself, is contingent upon God, incapable of existing apart from Him. Christians also believe in God's personal and direct intervention in the world—as opposed to a hands-off approach to creation—that affects not only the natural order but also the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ within human history.



**What are some ways you have seen the Lord provide when you were focused on trusting Him?**

### MY RESPONSE

Because Jesus is at the center of creation, all that we do is done for Him and His glory as we live with complete dependence and trust in His faithful provision.

- **HEAD:** How does God's sovereignty shape your understanding of God's providence?
- **HEART:** How will you strive for peace in temptations and trials knowing God is providentially working for your good?
- **HANDS:** What are some ways you will live out God's call to be a good steward and neighbor in light of God's providence?

NOTES

### VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Just as he gave existence to that which did not exist, so he gave new creation to that which did exist."<sup>4</sup>

-Gregory of Nazianzus  
(c. 329-390)



# WHAT MAKES THE BIBLE MAKE SENSE

by Aaron Armstrong

The first time I read the Bible—and I mean really read the Bible, not just random snippets that showed up on TV shows and in comic books and novels—was when I was 25. It wasn't a book I had grown up around; it never even occurred to me that I should read it. And I'll be honest, when I did read it the first time, it was because I wanted to make fun of a Christian friend.

God, with His divine sense of irony, had other plans. I walked down the street from my home to a Christian bookstore that happened to be a mere two blocks away. I purchased a Bible with the help of a bewildered employee, then returned home to start reading. Several people, including the woman at the store, encouraged starting with John's Gospel. Because I'm a contrarian by nature, I started with Mark.

As I read, I was fascinated by this Jesus person, this man who claimed to be God, who was so different than the Jesus pop culture mocked so incessantly, which up to that point was the only Jesus I knew. This Jesus was not like that one. He was a man who had power over evil, could heal the sick, and taught with authority. A man of whom His own disciples said, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and

the sea obey him" (Matt. 8:27). He was a man who caused a reaction in everyone He encountered.

## WHAT IS THE BIBLE ABOUT?

And then I became a Christian, and as a new believer, I was amazed by what I was reading. But I was also confused. Part of my confusion actually came from what I was being taught. I was learning good and biblical principles for living. I was exposed to several different verses every week, but I didn't know how to fit it all together. Was the Bible a collection of principles, inspirational sayings, and moral examples, like an instruction manual for life? I couldn't shake the feeling that I was missing something. One day, I realized what that something was while reading about Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees in John 5. (Yes, in John's Gospel.)

The Pharisees were, of course, the "Bible guys" of their day. They loved the Law; they studied it diligently. They pored over every word. But when Jesus began His ministry, at first they were confused about Him—and soon their confusion turned to anger. Who was this man to violate the Law, or at least their approach

to it? Who was this man who was a “friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Matt. 11:19)? They tried to turn people against Him, to trap Him with questions over biblical interpretation, and more besides. They attacked His character, and even His family. They even tried to kill Him. But Jesus’ assessment of them was earth-shattering:

“You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, and yet they testify about me” (John 5:39).

### **WHAT—OR WHO—MAKES THE BIBLE MAKE SENSE**

And there it was, the thing that I had been missing. The key to the puzzle that the Bible can seem to be for many of us—even those who grew up with it. Many Christians spend their whole lives approaching the Bible as basically a big book of rules, morality tales, and inspirational sayings. And although there is much to be inspired by, many moral truths, and many wise commands contained within it, if that’s all we see the Bible as, we’re missing its point. We’ll diligently study the book searching for the secret of eternal life and may miss the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6).

But seeing that all Scripture testifies about Jesus changes everything about how we understand the Bible—and how we live in light of it. We will recognize the Old Testament not as a wholly separate collection of writings but as the foundation and foreshadowing of everything that happens in the New,

the first part of one big story told from Genesis to Revelation. We will see the New Testament for what it is, as good news of great joy for all people—because Jesus came to fulfill the Law, to rescue us through His death and resurrection, and to restore the relationship with our Creator that sin ruined. And we can live faithfully in the world right now, as good news people in a bad news world. People who live knowing how the story God is telling ends, a story that says all the bad we experience right now in this world will come to an end in the world to come, when Jesus returns to make all things new, to put an end to sin and sadness and suffering. When death will die, and God’s people will all rejoice.

### **GOOD NEWS TOO GOOD TO KEEP TO OURSELVES**

This is the understanding we need to fully make sense of the Bible in the way God intended (Luke 24:27; John 5:39). As much as the Bible encourages us, helps us to live wisely, and provides powerful examples of courage and compassion, we need to turn away from our tendencies to reduce it to being about such things. God wants us to see something so much more than that, something so much bigger—that the gospel is at work from beginning to end. That Jesus is at its center. We need His help to see this—and we need His help so that we might help others see it as well. To be people who say with John the Baptist, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). This good news needs to be shared with the whole world. May God help us to do it.

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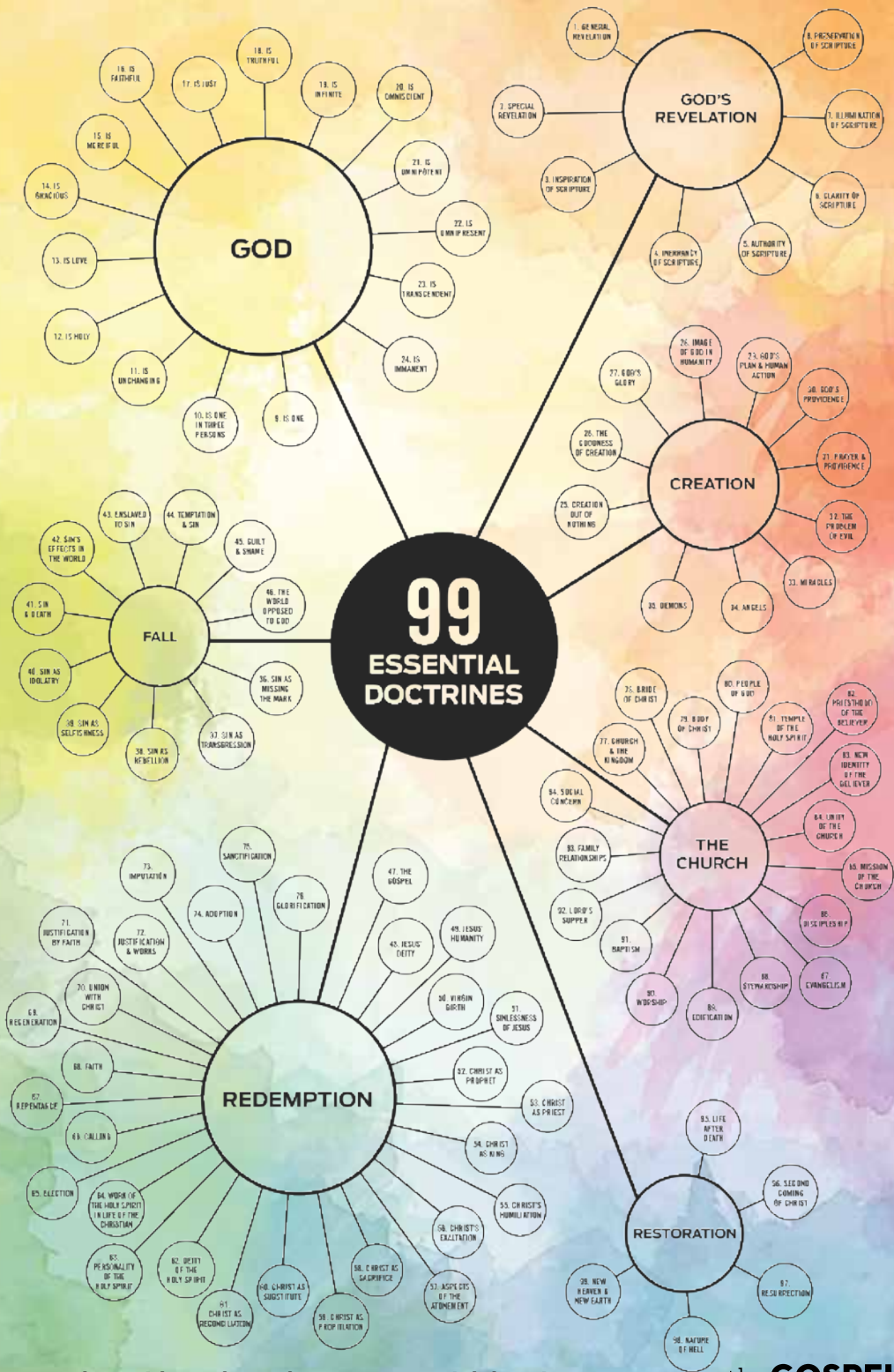
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## FROM CREATION TO CHAOS

In the beginning, God created everything for His glory and our good. But when sin entered the world in the garden of Eden, creation appeared to be ruined. Out of the ruins, God made a promise to Abraham: through one of his descendants, God would bless the whole world—and restore the good creation He made. Through this study, your group will discover the truth that nothing is outside of God’s plan or control to redeem creation from sin.

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