

Understanding God’s Providence

Passages: As listed in the lesson.

Memory Verse

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word]	Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature]	Good Works [Behavior]
God wants to provide for our needs and guide our future.	1. God is a sovereign King. 2. God is a loving Father.	Trust in God’s provision and guidance without worry or fear.

Overview

Events and Spiritual Teachings

- A. God’s Providence
- B. God Is the Best Provider

Life Application: Learn to Trust in God’s Providence

Memory Verse

Conclusion: God knows our needs, so we must trust in God’s ability to provide for us more than in our own ability—we need not fear nor worry.

Spiritual Teachings

Introduction

(Teachers: Ask your students, "How would you define providence?" Invite responses from students, even if they are inaccurate or incorrect.)

Providence can be defined as God's guidance and care over creation, especially in sustaining or guiding human destiny. Destiny refers to the specific events that will happen in a person's future.

Aesop's fable *The Ant and the Grasshopper* tells the story of an ant that gathered food in the plentiful summer to prepare for the scarcity of winter; meanwhile, the grasshopper just played around. The moral of the story: the ant could "provide" food in the winter months because the ant had the *foresight* to prepare. Many times, we may make great plans, but our plans for the future go wrong because there are things we cannot foresee nor prepare for. But God, in His infinite knowledge, power, and wisdom, always succeeds in His plans. So, we must understand the difference between what God can provide in our lives and what man can provide for himself with his own power.

A. God's Providence

In the beginning, God presented Adam and Eve with a choice: Be guided by your own desires, or trust God's insight and direction for your lives (Gen 2:16–17; 3:6). This is the central point to understanding God's providence in our lives. If we could provide for ourselves, then God's providence would be unnecessary. Those who do not believe in God believe that they can provide for themselves and direct their own lives. But God is the one who truly provides, so man must defer to God and trust in His provision.

God's providence is important to understand because God gave mankind an important ability: free will (Gen 2:16–17; Deut 11:26–28; 30:1–3, 15–18; Josh 24:15; Jer 26:4–6). Free will refers to our ability to make our own plans and decisions, and to seek out our own needs and wants. However, God has offered His commandments as guidelines for our choices (Gen 2:16–17). He has given each of us a choice as to whether or not we follow, trust, and obey Him. As His children, our free will should abide by the limits placed by God.

Although we must learn to trust in God's providence, trusting Him does not mean that we can sit back, do nothing, and laze around. Rather, it means that we must trust in God's ability to guide and direct our path more than we trust in our own ability to provide for ourselves. Let's examine some of the ways God's provision is greater than our own.

1. God provides as a sovereign God and loving Father

God promised Abraham that his wife would bear a son, even though she was past childbearing age. Childbearing would have been humanly impossible, but the impossible became possible because Abraham trusted in God's power. However, years after Isaac's birth, God tested Abraham. He asked Abraham to take his only son Isaac, whom he loved, and sacrifice him as a burnt offering. Let's read Genesis 22:1–14.

Why did God call on Abraham to sacrifice his only son? God was testing whether Abraham would obediently surrender Isaac out of his fear of God. Let's turn to Hebrews 11:17–19.

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called,’ concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead[.]”

Whatever pain Abraham may have felt at the thought of sacrificing his only son, he completely trusted in God’s promise. As a result, God stopped him, and instead provided a ram for him to offer. “And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, ‘In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided’ ” (Gen 22:14). No matter how difficult or miserable the situation we face, we have a sovereign God and a loving Father. He will provide whatever we need.

2. God provides during our tests of faith

The trials that we face in our lives are often a test of our faith. One very good example can be found in the Book of Daniel, chapter three. The king threatened Daniel’s three friends with death in a fiery furnace if they did not worship the golden statue. The three refused. “If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up” (Dan 3:17–18). They had no idea whether or not God would save them from the fiery furnace, but they nonetheless remained faithful.

In the end, though Daniel’s three friends were bound and thrown into the hot furnace, King Nebuchadnezzar saw them walking around freely, unharmed, along with a fourth figure that looked like “the Son of God” (Dan 3:25). Daniel’s three friends completely trusted in God, even under the threat of death, and in return for their faithfulness, He delivered them from death.

When we encounter trials in our faith, God sees that we are in need. However, for God to provide for our need, we need to keep our faith in Him, just as Daniel’s three friends did. Let’s read 1 Peter 1:7. A genuine faith in God is more precious than gold, and even in the face of trials, when we truly have faith in God, our actions will glorify God. No matter what trials we may face, when we trust in Him, He will answer with His provision.

3. God provides in our times of need

Sometimes, we may be weak in our faith and question how God can or will provide for us. During these times, we must run to God and ask Him for His providence. Whether our faith is weak or strong, we must go to God and share our fears, worries, concerns, and doubts. We must ask God to provide for us in our time of need. Even if what we need is a stronger faith, we must still ask Him for His help. We must not doubt His promise of providence, for His promise is true and He will provide. “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:19).

B. God Is the Best Provider

God can guide and care for us so effectively because He knows us more than we even know ourselves.

1. God’s intimate knowledge of our past

The Bible tells us that God knew us and what we would do even before we were born:

- a. God sees our “unformed” substance (Ps 139:16).
- b. God set Jeremiah apart as a prophet before Jeremiah was even born (Jer 1:5).
- c. Apostle Paul said that God “separated [him] from [his] mother’s womb and called [him] through His grace” (Gal 1:15).

2. God's intimate knowledge of our present

The Bible teaches us that God also knows us intimately in the present:

- a. God knows every hair on our head, and not one of them will fall to the ground apart from God's will (Mt 10:29–31).
- b. No creature is hidden from God's sight; all things are naked and open before God's eyes, and everything that we do will one day be accounted for (Heb 4:13; Mk 4:22).
- c. There are no secrets from God (Eccl 12:14). It may be scary to realize that God is all-knowing and all-seeing. But at the same time, we can bring everything to Him in prayer because He understands us so deeply.
- d. Since God knows us intimately, He can help us as no other person in this world can. Through the Spirit, God knows our weaknesses and can help us with them. He can even help intercede for us (Rom 8:26).

3. God's intimate knowledge of our future

The Bible tells us that God also knows our future.

- a. God declares the end from the beginning; He knows and directs what will happen (Isa 46:10).
- b. God knows what words we will say before we even say them (Ps 139:4).
- c. God knows and directs the times and places where nations live (Acts 17:26).
- d. God directs our path in life (Prov 20:24; Jer 10:23).

God knows all things and is in control of all things, which is why His promises are always true. Since God knows us intimately from beginning to end—before we were born, at our present situation in life, and in our future—let us ask ourselves: “Is there anyone in a better position to guide and care for us than God Himself?” The answer is: No.

There is no one apart from God who is in a better position to guide and care for us. He is our sovereign Ruler, yet within God's sovereignty is His love. He is the only one with the power to provide, and like a loving Father, He wants to guide and care for us each day (Isa 46:3–4). God knows our needs, so we must trust in His ability to provide for us more than in our own ability. With His providence, we never need to fear nor worry in our lives.

Check for Understanding

1. **What does it mean that God has given us free will?** God has given us the ability to choose and make moral decisions freely. In giving us the freedom to choose, we need to learn to live by faith.
2. **What does it mean to trust in God's providence?** Trusting Him does not mean that we can sit back, do nothing, and laze around. Rather, it means that we must trust in God's ability to guide and direct our path more than we trust in our own ability to provide for ourselves.
3. **How is God's provision greater than our own?** God provides as a sovereign God and loving Father; He provides during our tests of faith; and He provides in our times of need.
4. **Like Daniel's three friends, what do we need for God's provision during our tests of faith?** We need to keep our faith in Him. No matter what trials we may face, when we trust in Him, He will answer with His provision.
5. **Why is God the best provider for us?** He can guide and care for us so effectively because He knows us more than we know ourselves.

Life Application

Learn to Trust in God's Providence

1. Trust in times of difficulty

Job endured a great deal of suffering when he faced the trials God allowed in his life (Job 1:6–2:8). His suffering became so great that his wife told him, “Curse God and die!” But Job replied, “You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?” (Job 2:9–10). Throughout his trials, Job accepted that he did not understand why such awful things were happening. Job eventually recognized his lack of insight, and as a result, he was able to see God more clearly (Job 42:2–6).

God's care and guidance are difficult to remember when we undergo trials and difficulties. This is because when our hearts and minds are focused on our struggles, we create a fog through which we cannot see God. Once Job understood his lack of insight, God blessed Job twice as much as before (Job 42:10). We must learn to entrust our lives into God's hands during our trials, so that we can receive God's blessings.

2. Trust without worry or fear

Difficulties and challenges in our lives show us just how much we really trust and have faith in God. Weightlifters don't know their true strength until they begin to lift. In the same way, trials that we face reveal the true strength and nature of our faith. But how do we face such trials without fear or worry?

Jesus has taught us that when we fully understand God's guidance and love for us, we will not worry nor be afraid about whether or not God will provide for us (Mt 6:25–34; 10:29–31). What we should truly be worried about is: Do we fear the God who can save or condemn both our body and soul? (Mt 10:28; Lk 12:5). Our greatest fear should not be the challenges we face. It should be whether we honor God after we know the truth, because if we do not, we can only expect God's judgment (Heb 10:26–27).

3. Trust through prayer

God wants to provide for our deepest needs, and He already has a perfect plan for our future. We can make our own path in life, but God's way is much better because He has full insight and knowledge into our situation and future, even more than we do (Isa 55:7–9; Jas 4:13–16). God will “fulfill the desire of those who fear Him” (Ps 145:19), so we must learn to trust Him with everything. But our trust only comes to life when we pray according to His will.

Prayer is the key to showing God that we trust and rely upon Him (cf. 1 Sam 1:10, 27). If we do not pray often, then we likely do not know how to rely on Him, because prayer is one of the most important methods through which God guides us. The Bible teaches us how God's providence is revealed through prayer:

- “Ask the LORD for rain in the time of the latter rain. [...] He will give them showers of rain, grass in the field for everyone” (Zech 10:1; cf. Jas 5:17–18).
- Jesus taught, “Ask, and it will be given to you” (Mt 7:7).
- When we ask in faith, according to His will, God hears our prayers (1 Jn 5:14–15; Jas 1:5–7).
- Do not be anxious over anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let our requests be made known to God (Phil 4:6). Then we can receive the divine peace that surpasses all understanding (Phil 4:7).

In prayer, we can ask God for all that we need and desire. But we need to ask according to His will, not our own. When we do so, we will experience God's providence and blessing in our lives. As Romans 8:28 says, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the

called according to His purpose.” God will fulfill our deepest needs and desires through prayer if, instead of following our own will, we learn to put our trust and focus upon His will and plan for us.

Trusting God to fulfill our needs and wants is difficult to do in trying times. But as we learn to rely on God’s provision more than our own, we become less fearful or worried about our future. This is because we know that God is in control, so we place our trust in Him. Whether in good times or bad, we should focus on God’s will and provision through our prayers.

4. Trust in spiritual friends

“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:19). God is always concerned with our needs, and He will provide for us beyond what we can imagine! His goal is to shape and mold us. To do so, He uses difficult times and trials to test us, so that we can become more Christ-like. In times like these, God may work through others to help us. One sister shared a testimony about how God provided for her through a friend during her trials of life. The following is an excerpt.

Testimony: Thank You

It is said that the Lord works in mysterious ways. I am inclined to believe He does. As I trace my Christian walk in the United States of America, I see how the Lord has led me into your care so that every one of you could help me and my family grow from one year to another.

In January 1989, my husband Larry was baptized. Six months later, he received the Holy Spirit. Thus 1989 became an especially good year for us. We were spiritually elevated, and we were equally elated about other aspects of our lives. We were all in relatively good health. Larry’s career in a major oil packaging company was challenging and rewarding. We had also achieved our American dream of home ownership, and to top that, we were able to remain a traditional family where Larry went to work, and I stayed at home to take care of our children. Our joy was complete.

But there is “a season and a time for every matter under heaven.” In the summer of 1990, Larry was diagnosed with a rare form of abdominal cancer. Again, you supported us with your prayers so that the surgeon could efficiently remove a tumor “the size of a small basketball,” and Larry was able to recover quickly from the surgery. He returned to work and, for about a year, was again in good health. However, over the next two years, we lived in fear of each new test. We fought the disease in any way we could and as hard as we could. We prayed and we fasted. We bargained for more time, and we promised to be missionaries. At the same time, Larry also subjected himself to a series of surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation treatments. We even tried special diets. Truly, the disease was a heavy cross to bear.

But we were never alone, for you carried our burden as well. You, too, fasted and prayed, more than we did or could ever do. You stayed with us as we sat and waited through each surgery to listen to the dreadful news of what was or was not inside Larry’s abdomen. You went through the ordeal of donating blood so that your life-giving force would sustain Larry during the initial stages of recovery. You served him healthy meals, brought him flowers and sent him greeting cards. You took care of my daughters and offered them your companionship. You invited me into your home so that I would have a place to rest for the night while Larry rested in his hospital bed with the assurance that I was only a short distance away. When there was a need for me to travel between my house and the hospital, you went out of your way to drive hundreds of miles to give me a ride.

By the summer of 1993, we found that the cancer had spread to Larry's liver. From then on, Larry began to lose weight. As Larry's health deteriorated, you continued your prayer vigils. Eventually, he was unable to attend to his personal needs. He also became incoherent. You understood my struggle and you continued to lend me your support. You stepped up your prayers, and you took turns to come by to assist me so that Larry would, in addition to being cared for by the nurses from the local hospice organization, receive round-the-clock care.

The following Monday, December 13, 1993, Larry passed on. Although the nurses had prepared me for the inevitable, you understood that it was not easy for me to let go of someone with whom I had spent almost half of my life. You also understood that I feared for my daughters who would now grow up fatherless. And so, you let us mourn while you got together to raise the funds to lay a dearly beloved brother to rest.

I thank you for all your good works. May the Lord Jesus reward you with His abundant grace.

– Susan Estrada

Discussion

- How can we see the hand of God's providence in this testimony?
- From this testimony, what can we learn about how we should trust God with our needs and plans in the future?
- Are you willing to be used by God to be someone's blessings through their tests?

Memory Verse

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28)

Paul understood that the Roman members suffering persecution may have begun to question whether they should be following Christ. He encouraged them, saying that since they love God and have been called by Him, everything will work out in the end. God will take care of His chosen.

What does it mean by "all things work together for good"?

Whether good or bad, all events that occur ultimately have a purpose, as they are a part of God's perfect plan. All that the Roman members endured occurred so that the gospel could be spread further. They all "work[ed] together for good." The trials that we endure are the same.

How are we one of "the called"?

Paul assured the members that God had called each of them to be His children and had set each of them apart to be sanctified. We, too, have been called by God to be set apart as one of His children.

Why is it important to become "those who love God"?

God blesses us in many different ways and gives His grace freely, but for our part, we must first love Him and follow His commandments. It is important that we do not take His providence for granted.

Conclusion

Since God knows us intimately from beginning to end—before we were born, at our present situation in life, and in our future. There is no one who is in a better position to guide and care for us. He is our sovereign Ruler, yet within God's sovereignty is His love. He is the only one with the power to provide,

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and like a loving Father, He wants to guide and care for us each day (Isa 46:3–4). With His providence, we never need to fear nor worry in our lives.

Lesson 6 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. Why is it important for us to become “those who love God”?
God blesses us in many different ways and gives His grace freely, but for our part, we must first love Him and follow His commandments. It is important that we do not take His providence for granted.
2. What is important to remember about our free will as God’s children?
God has offered His commandments as guidelines for our choices. As His children, our free will should abide by the limits placed by God.
3. What are three ways God in which provides?
He provides as a sovereign God and loving Father; God provides during our tests of faith; and God provides in our times of need.
4. Why is God’s care for us so much more effective than our own provision?
Because He knows us more than we even know ourselves. He has intimate knowledge of our past, our present, and our future.
5. How do we trust God without worry or fear?
When we fully understand God’s guidance and love for us, we will not worry nor be afraid about whether or not He will provide for us. Our greatest fear should not be the challenges we face, but whether we honor God after we know the truth.
6. Share a time when you have felt anxious or forgotten about God’s provision. After today’s lesson, what can you change if you are faced with similar situations in the future?
Personal answers.