

Study Guide

Series: Where Was God When
“The Providence of God”

This week we will examine some of the scriptures related to God’s will and the way God works in our world.

Monday – When we think of God’s providence (the way God provides for and cares for us and the world), we first understand that God not only created all that is, but that God designed the forces and laws of nature, the raw material of our planet, and the systems which allow our bodies to function. Begin by making a list of all the things that God has given us in nature, in creation, and in our bodies and minds that are a part of his provision for us (the first point of yesterday’s sermon may help). Often when we are disappointed in God, we forget all that God has done for us and the wonder of these things. Let’s read a few scriptures about this. *Read Psalm 19 and Psalm 8.* These are both known as “creation psalms.” Note in Psalm 8 how God has made human beings rulers over creation – this ties back in to the source of much evil – the improper use of our power and freedom as human beings. *Read James 1:16-17.*

Tuesday – God is constantly at work in our world, but not by coercing and forcing human beings to do what he wills. Instead, God persuades and influences us by the promptings of His Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, we read the wonderful story of the prophet Elijah. In our text, we read today of Elijah being threatened by the evil queen Jezebel. As you read this text, note how Elijah feels and what he is thinking, especially with regard to God. Notice in verses 11-12 how the Lord came to Elijah – it was not in the wind, fire, or earthquake. *Read 1 Kings 19:1-12.* When we read of the “Word of the Lord” coming to an Old Testament prophet, how do you think that happened? Let’s take a look at how God directs our path as described by Jesus in the New Testament. *Read John 16:5-15.* Note that the Spirit will conflict the world of guilt and sin and righteousness. What do you think this means? Have you ever experienced God speaking to you and guiding you, either through a sermon, scripture reading, or the interior witness of the Holy Spirit? How and when has this happened? This is part of God’s providence and care and his active work in our world – guiding us and leading us into his will.

Wednesday – In Sunday’s sermon, we quoted Dr. Shirley Guthrie from his excellent book, *Christian Doctrine*, in which he writes, “Evil must serve God.” What a powerful concept – that though God doesn’t desire evil, and evil is the antithesis of God’s will, even evil is forced to serve the purposes of God. We gave several examples of that in Sunday’s sermon. The greatest example of this, of course, is the Cross – Jesus died at the hands of human beings who insisted on killing the only truly holy man who ever lived - God’s own son. But God used their evil to deliver the world from sin. In the New Testament, we find that God uses suffering in our lives for our good. Let’s take a look at a few passages, some of which you may have read in prior week’s study guides: *Read Romans 8:28.* What does this passage mean to you? *Read Romans 5:1-6 and James 1:2-4.* In each of these last two scriptures, God was not causing the suffering – it was inflicted, especially in James, by the people who were persecuting Christians. But God

used this evil to shape the heart and souls of the believers. How have you seen God take the bad things in your life and use them for your good?

Thursday – One of the regular promises of the Bible is that God will always be with us. *Read Matthew 28:20 – the last line and the last promise of Jesus before he ascended to heaven.* Throughout the Bible, we are told not to be afraid for God will be with us. *Read John 14:15-27.* Here Jesus explains how God is with us through his Holy Spirit. We have already learned of the Holy Spirit's guidance in our lives. What else does the Holy Spirit do in the life of a believer? *Read Romans 8:9-27.* List on a piece of paper what Paul says that the Holy Spirit does in our lives. *Note verse 18* – one of the great verses in the Bible. *In verses 19-23,* Paul speaks of all of the creation here on earth experiencing difficulty until the day when Christ returns. Sin has infected all of creation. Our planet itself suffers under our improper use of our freedom and it anxiously awaits (groans) for the day when God will restore all things.

Friday – We often long for God to directly intervene in our world. We wonder why God doesn't simply heal all we pray for. Why does God not eliminate evil people by striking them down before they kill or abuse? We are frustrated with a God who could unravel the mystery of illnesses, but does not do this for us. We wonder why God doesn't feed all of the children of the world. And we often feel God is absent in our crises. But a major theme through the entire Bible is that God accomplishes his work through human beings. God used Noah, and Abraham, and nation of Israel. God used Moses and Pharaoh, David and Solomon, the Judges and the prophets. When God most directly intervened in our world, he came as a baby and lived as a man for 33 years. And today, the Church is called to be God's continuing presence in this world. *Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-27.* Here we find God's primary mode of operating being identified. This places a huge responsibility for the state of the world squarely on the shoulders of the Church and individual Christians. How does God accomplish his purposes through the Church and individual Christians? What does this mean for how you live and respond to suffering and evil in this world?

Helpful Books on God and Suffering

Disappointment with God, by Philip Yancey

The Will of God, by Leslie Weatherhead

The Problem of Pain, by C.S. Lewis

Where is God When it Hurts, by Philip Yancey