

Esther Series – Providence Esther 4:14

Dave Shepardson, Calvary Chapel Nuevo / wordbymail.com

The title of this message is as big as it gets: “Providence.” We’ll be looking at Esther 4:14. Coming out of the Book of Ruth, I thought we’d just head right over to Esther because Ruth and Esther are very similar in this one core lesson - Providence. Ruth and Esther are both great opportunities to see the providence of God at work in historical narratives.

Remember in Ruth Chapter 1 that Ruth had made this all-in decision to follow God, to follow his people, and to follow Naomi. And she left this Pagan, perverted, mixed-up world of Moab and she entered into the culture of God’s People. Ruth did that.

Now Esther is going to do just the opposite. She is a woman of God. She is part of God’s people and she’s been thrown into a mixed-up, perverted world – not of Moab, but even worse; the Medo-Persian world which we’ll develop next message.

In Ruth we saw God’s redemptive love and God’s providence in guiding her to his redemption and to the bloodline of Christ. We’re going to see Esther, in a similar way, God providentially leading and guiding her and the characters of the story, not so much for redemption and illustration of redemption, but in order to save the Jewish people.

Today and through this book, we’re going to see God working towards this celebration of the salvation of his people through the providential leading and guiding of a few key figures – our main heroine, of course, Esther.

Along with God leading and guiding her, we’re going to also see her have to make some choices. In fact, for a moment Esther doesn’t know whether she’s going to join God in his providential work.

This is what I want to start with today before launch into Esther. It’s really important. God is providentially working. He’s leading and guiding and providing for the circumstances that we find ourselves in. Then at a certain moment – we call it a “crisis of belief” – God calls us to join him in his providential work.

So God is orchestrating and he’s working in the good and the bad. He is working through it all. Then he brings us to this point where he asks us, “Do you believe? Do you believe enough to act? Do you believe enough to take part in the eternal plan that I’ve been orchestrating all around you that you really have no idea of?”

That’s the core lesson that goes from Ruth into Esther, and that’s why some of the scholars teach them together. I thought I’d do that same thing.

Instead of Ruth being a small-town girl in Bethlehem (a little farm girl picking up barley grain in the field), we go as far away from Bethlehem and as far away from the farm as we possibly can. Esther finds herself in the winter capital of the king of Persia. The city name is Susa. We'll develop it; I'm just trying to give you an overview.

Esther finds herself where most of the events of the book of Esther take place – in what's called the Great Hall of the Palace. The great hall is where the events of Esther take place, instead of in the dirt field like Ruth. The Great Hall of the Palace of Susa of the king of Persia is the length of a football field and three times as wide. Think three football fields side to side, all built out of marble with these phenomenal rows of marble columns, and gold and silver and jewels. Even the benches are made of gold. The serving cups and goblets are all gold.

So we go from the dirt of the fields of Bethlehem and God's providence leading Ruth and the characters of Ruth to the most opulent, prideful, arrogant, pompous, world-ruling King in this incredibly opulent hall, bigger than we can imagine, and with more money than we can imagine.

God puts two Jewish girls in these two places – one in the dirt field, and where Boaz is trading sandals at the city gate. Then we go from trading sandals in the dirt at the city gate in Ruth, to this prideful, pompous, world-controlling King of Persia sitting on his mighty throne. If you come to him without being asked, the sentence is immediate death. "Kill him." That's the kind of King we're dealing with here. This guy is an idiot (because of his pride) and he rules most of the world.

Esther is as far away from Ruth as you can get, circumstantially. There's a reason I say that. *God is not limited by your environment.* He took Ruth in the dirt fields, barely picking up enough grain to eat, and he used her to change the course of history of the Jewish people. He used her as an illustration of eternal redemption and he put her in the bloodline of Christ.

Then God goes from that nowhere, dirt, worthless field, to the most opulent palace – of the kingdom ruling most of the earth at the time – and he takes another Jewish girl and puts her right there. And he says, "Now I'm going to use you to change the course of the history of the Jewish people – in fact, to save them in mass."

Here's my point. Maybe we can grasp picking up grain, with wheat growing around here in Nuevo right now – we can kinda grasp that. But a palace with a banquet hall the size of three football fields covered with gold and marble? That's a bit of a stretch for most of us. But it doesn't matter to God.

He uses a Jewish girl in the field and he uses a Jewish girl in the palace. What does that mean? *It means that where you're at today does not limit what God is doing in your life.* It means you cannot say, "I'm just here" or "I'm just there" or "I've got too much to do"

or “I don't have enough of a position.” The first great contrast between Ruth and Esther is that God is working providentially (and equally) at opposite ends of life's spectrum.

What we're going to see when we go in to Esther – just like we saw in Ruth – is that God is at work, right where you are at. It doesn't matter what *you* think or the environment you think you are in. God is at work. He is involved in the circumstances surrounding your life and he is accomplishing his purposes. He is. It's called providence. There's only one choice – only one option – that you have. You either join him or you rebel against him. But God is at work, right where you're at. That's what I want you to see today.

Let's pray and ask God to open that up to us.

Heavenly Father, please Lord, this word brings all kinds of stuff – theology, hair-splitting debates, choosing sides, man's logic – all those things that create such a mess and that are a fog that keep us from seeing you, Lord. God, clear our path, clear our minds, clear our vision, Lord. Help us to see that you are sovereignly providential. Huge words, Lord, that are impossible to fully grasp.

Help us to see today, God, that you are at work right where we're at and that you are involved in the circumstances that we found ourselves in when we woke up this morning. You are not silent and you are not hidden, Lord. God, You are active and working around us, God. You have a purpose and a plan for right where we find ourselves today, God. If we embrace that, then we will enjoy the eternal blessings, Lord, of being part of your eternal plan and of being used by you instead of being pushed aside by you, Lord.

God, we know that your purpose will be accomplished in the world. We know that. God, give us a heart to be a part of it. Show us. Give us eyes to see where you're working and the heart and desire to join you there. Show us, God, through the Book of Esther, Lord, that you're organizing and orchestrating; that you're creating and controlling. Each one of us has that moment where we have to choose to either join you or run from you. God help us.

God help us join you where you're at work in our lives no matter what the circumstances look like or feel like. Help us to join you where you're working today, Lord. In Jesus' name, amen.

The word that we use to define this truth that we're going to develop through the book of Esther is the word “Providence.” It's a theological word and some would say that I might not have been in my best mind when I chose to address it in a 45 minute sermon on a Sunday. It's a theology term that's best addressed in classrooms and extended debate sessions, etc. Not best addressed; it's worst addressed there because that's when everybody gets their own logic and their own thinking to it.

I want to talk about providence today and let me tell you how hard this has hit me. I had this great message prepared. Well, it was almost prepared. It was at least in the process of being prepared. I was getting into Esther 1 and doing the whole first chapter of Esther. Late yesterday I went out and told my wife, "Babe, I'm in trouble. I have to change the whole message. I have to tell the church about providence. I have to and I'm scared." That's what I told her: "I'm scared." It's such a big word and we have such pea brains. (I said "we.")

I thought we would look at the theme verse for Esther and then just focus on one word today before we launch into Esther next week. If we will, then you'll have a grasp on this phenomenal life-changing truth and then as we go in to Esther, you'll see it develop and illustrated in Esther. You'll be like, "Oh, okay. I get it." So stay with me for the hard stuff and you'll enjoy the book of Esther as we go.

The key verse is Esther 4:14. A few minutes ago I was talking about a crisis of belief that God orchestrates and organizes. He leads and guides us and then he puts us in this place where we're brought to this crisis of belief where we have to choose to either join God or reject his calling. That's where Esther is in this verse. She's at this pinnacle place where she has to decide, "Am I going to join God in his providential work, or is God going to have to slide me over to 'the curb' so that he can use someone else?"

Esther 4:14 Mordecai says to Esther at this critical turning point, "***For if you keep silent*** (that means she has a choice) ***at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place...***"

That means God will accomplish his purpose. Do you see it right there? There are two beautiful ends of providence. Number one, Esther has a choice to join God in the eternal plan and purpose that he has for her. But if she chooses to reject and rebel, God will still accomplish his plan – just without her, which is bad by the way. It's not like he says, "Oh, good. I'm glad you'll do it with someone else. I'll go back to playing Nintendo." God will still accomplish his plan, but he will do it without you – and that's bad.

So Esther is challenged. "***For if you keep silent relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your Father's house will perish.*** (Look at this killer verse) ***And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"***

Mordecai shakes Esther and says, "Listen, girl. Why do you think you're here? Do you think it's for you? Do you think this is for you that God has put you here? Wrong. God's plan; God's purpose. You're his servant. He has put you here for a reason. Are you going to join him in accomplishing his purpose or are you going to bail out? Who knows if God has put you here in the kingdom for such a time as this?"

That is as great a single verse summary of providence as we can get. Let's define it and we'll try to draw it out a little bit. We'll start with some simple definitions.

Providence – “The loving care and governance that God exercises over the created universe.” The Pocket Dictionary of Apologetics gave me that definition and since it is a popular pocket dictionary, it was short. Most of the theological dictionaries for “providence” have about six pages. So this is a great, short definition.

“The loving care in governance that God exercises over the created universe.” That is everything. Zondervan Bible Dictionary (another simply worded Bible dictionary) says this, “Providence concerns God's support, his care, and his supervision of all creation.” his support, his care, his supervision – his overseeing – of all creation. Even Webster's kind of gets this definition right – “Providence is divine guidance or care.” Really, it should say “and care.”

God's providence deals with two things primarily. Number one, God's *supervision* – as in God guides. That is God's supervision. He is superintending. He is overseeing. He is leading, guiding, orchestrating, and (yes) controlling events in your life and around your life. That is his supervision.

The second big part of providence is God's *provision* – meaning he is providing for the events in your life. You might say, “Not as I've become accustomed to being provided for, he's not.” Yeah, I know. But he is providing. He has provided.

If you've never experienced this, find a Christian who has experienced this. Someone who says, “Do you know what? God provided for me before I knew I needed it. God was already there providing for me before I arrived. That's God's providence. God loves me so much that he is setting a place for me before I get to the table, including in the difficult circumstances of life.”

God is there at work on your behalf before you arrive. That's God's providence – his *supervision* and his *provision*. If we look at it personally, you notice it's all creation. God is supervising and providing for all of the created universe. You understand that Hebrews says that the world is held together by the “word of his power” – the RHEMA. We would just not exist if God wasn't supervising and if he wasn't providing for all of creation.

Let me make it personal because I know that's what we're interested in. Personally, *providence is God's provision for the events in your life*. It means that where you find yourself today, God has provision for you.

Number two, *God is involved in the events of your life*. God is not on vacation. He's not asleep in the back of the boat – although at a time he was, just to prove a point. God is not hiding. He's not in secret. He's involved. He is actively involved right now in the circumstances of your life. He has provided for the circumstances of your life. *He will*

accomplish his purpose in your life. The goal here is to give you some peace, so work with me.

His goal is to accomplish... No, no. he *will* accomplish. God doesn't have goals. He has wills. He will accomplish his purpose in your life. Philippians 1:6 says, "***The work that he has begun in you, he will finish at the day of Jesus Christ.***" God will accomplish the work he has for you. He is involved in what you are going through and he has already provided a way.

1 Corinthians 10:13 "***No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.***"

Even in your trials and even in your temptations, God is already there and has provided a way out. That's God's provision. I want you to see that God is at work in all our lives.

God's providence is such a huge concept that, honestly, we can't completely and fully grasp it. We just can't. That's why when you get around these heady, theological, know-it-alls (I am not one of those guys so when I get around those guys, I'm like, "I've got to go wash my hair or something"), they debate. "What does this mean if this? What does this mean if that? What about this?" They try to create these unanswerable questions. I'm like, "I've just got to go find somebody who's hungry and give them a burger. You guys talk about that all you want."

God's providence is so big, it's so complex, and it's so all-encompassing that we can't grasp it. Let me try to explain to you why.

Do you know what an abacus is? An abacus is that little box with the wires and beads on it. You've seen that in school. The first abacus was developed in 2600 B.C. Twenty-six hundred years before Christ, the Chinese developed the abacus. Do you have an abacus in your mind? That's funny, because the abacus *is* your mind. Just receive that. The abacus is your mind.

Now go with me to Kobe, Japan. Right now they're finishing the K computer. It's the supercomputer and it the world's fastest computer currently being built (just about finished) in Kobe, Japan. Here is the size of this computer. What is your mind again? An abacus. We're going to compare it to the world's supercomputer.

The K computer does 8.2 quadrillion calculations per second. It is as powerful as one million desktop computers connected together. It requires enough energy to continually run 10,000 homes. That's how much power it takes to run the supercomputer. 8.2 quadrillion calculations per second.

For us to say to God, "Hey, God. I'm with you. Just explain providence to me. I can handle it." That's like our little Chinese 2600 B.C. guy walking up to the supercomputer in Kobe, Japan with his abacus saying, "Come on. Let's go at it. 8.2 quadrillion calculations per second? I can do it. Come on. Let's have a race." That's stupid.

When people say, "Well, here's what I think God is thinking" or "Here's how I see God" or "This is how I see God's providence," it's like, "Really? Abacus – supercomputer."

So we agree that we cannot fully know the mind of God. His ways are higher than ours. His thoughts are higher than ours. Isaiah 55 says "*As the heavens are above the earth, so are his ways above ours.*" We can't get it. All we can do is see what he reveals to us and then choose to believe it or reject it. That is what we get to.

Dictionary of Biblical Imagery (a great dictionary) says "*God's providential control of events in a person's life is illustrated by virtually every narrative in the Bible.*" That is a massive statement. The Bible is a really big book and it has a lot of narratives. A narrative is a story, generally a historical story. The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery says "*God's providential control of events in a person's life is illustrated by virtually every narrative in the Bible.*" It's speaking of his guiding and his orchestrating – him being at work in our lives.

Both Ruth and Esther are perfect illustrations. It's every narrative, but the other two huge ones are Abraham and Joseph. We taught Joseph a few years ago and that was great going through the life of Joseph. They have it over at Word By Mail.

Let's take a look at just a few key things that demonstrate providence in Joseph's life. We'll start in Genesis 39:3 "*The Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands.*" Do you see what part of that is providence? The Lord caused all that Joseph did to succeed in his hands. You're like, "I'm in. If I can get that kind of providence, then I want some." If that's the providence, then I want that. I want God to make everything succeed in my hands.

What about that part being sold in to slavery, thrown into a pit, and left for dead? How about that part of Joseph's life where he was left alone in a dungeon for two years as if God had forgotten him? That's not the providence I want. I want the providence where the Lord causes everything to succeed in my hands, but I don't want that providence. I want it my way.

God says, "What? This is not Burger King." The only way you can "have it your way" is to be your own god. Some of you are like, "Okay, I'll take that option." Bad choice.

Isaiah 14:12 and following describes a guy who wanted to be his own God. His name was Lucifer and you can see what happened to him in Isaiah 14.

This is God's providence. But so was Joseph being thrown in a pit, left for dead, sold into slavery, wrongly accused by a crazy, sex-crazed wife, thrown into prison for two years, and left to rot in prison. It was all part of God's providence.

Here's the deal about providence. We can only see it in the rearview mirror. Do you realize that you can't see providence in the windshield? All the people who say, "God was at work ahead of me before I got there" can say that because they've been there and they're looking at that circumstance in the past. They're saying "God was there. I thought he wasn't. I felt alone. I felt abandoned by God but when I look back in the rearview mirror, God was there and he was carrying me."

So Joseph does that in Genesis 45:8. Joseph says to his brothers ***"It was not you who sent me here, but God."***

Really, Joe? That was God that threw you in that pit and left you for dead? That was God who sold you in to slavery? That was God who let you rot in prison for two years? I thought that was us. I thought that was Potiphar's wife.

It was, but God was in control.

I'm going to deal with what you're thinking, because I know you're thinking, "Yeah but, yeah but." Just hold on.

Joseph says, "Yeah, tough times? I've had them. Difficult times? Yeah, I've had them – even life threatening times. But God was orchestrating. God was at work. God was providing for me. God was superintending the events of my life. God was at work. It was God who sent me here for his good plan and for his good purpose. It was God who sent me."

Here's the deal. This is what we find in Esther. It's really hard to join God in his plan and his purpose if your whole life revolves around you. If you're the only one on your throne (and your throne only seats one), then you can't join God in his work. You just can't. You have to choose. You have to make the break. Crucify your own life and say, "Lord, I'm all in now. I'm fully surrendered now. I will serve you no matter what. I trust you. I trust you no matter what."

That's when you begin to see God's plan and God's purpose and God's peace because you're not challenging God, battling him, and debating him, saying, "Lord, why don't You make this better? Why don't you make this better? Why don't you make this better?"

Instead you're saying, "Okay, God. I've had a revelation. You are God and I'm not. You know and I don't. You have a plan and I don't have one. You know how I am going to get through this and I don't. So show me. Show me how you are providentially working in my life. Show me how you're leading and guiding. Show me how you're providing and

I'll join you where you're working instead of demanding that you be the big blue genie in Aladdin and I get to rub my Bible and ask three wishes from." Don't make God a genie.

The Psalms are full of the providence of God. Read through them. Just look through the Psalms and mark every place where you see God leading and guiding his people. It will be in almost every Psalm. It's phenomenal. Look through the Psalms and look for God's leading and guiding and providing of his people. That's providence.

Psalm 139:9-10 *"If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me."*

If you belong to God right now, you have always belonged to God where God exists. If you are going to belong to God, you have always belonged to God. Here's a little thing we have to grasp. God is outside of time. He is not bound by the time continuum. If you belong to God, you always have and there is no place where you can go where God's hand shall not lead you. His hand is leading you. That's providence.

Verse 10 says ***"...his right hand shall hold me."*** There's no place you can go that God isn't still holding you. There is no place where you can go where you can say, "I have been abandoned by God. He has left me alone. He hasn't done this for me. He hasn't done that for me." That's not true. It's blasphemous.

God is there. There's no circumstance you can get to that God isn't still leading you and isn't still holding you. Your choice is to receive that or reject it. That's your only choice. Amen.

There's no place you can go that God isn't leading and guiding you. I know that some of us have been in some very dark and difficult places. And I know there are many – honestly, me included –that would say, "Really, God? Really? Your hand was there?" The answer is yes. There's no place we can go where his hand isn't holding us. There's no place we can go where his right hand isn't supporting us. No place.

This is not an evaluation of your circumstances. This is an evaluation of your God, and you either choose to believe who he is or deny who he is. The Bible says he was there and he was at work to bring you through. His plan was for a purpose that you can't grasp – an eternal purpose. He was at work and he was at work ultimately for your good.

The question is, can you believe God – not can you accept your circumstances. Can you believe God? Then what about the bad events? Remember, we have an abacus for a brain. God has an immeasurable supercomputer for a brain. I cannot convey to your abacus God's supercomputer.

So you say to me, "What about the bad events in my life?" and I say, "Your bad events don't change God." And you say, "Yeah but..." then I try to answer you in this way. Here

are the things we know about God. God does not cause evil. He is not the author of evil, if that's a theological issue for you. He is not the author of evil and he does not cause sin.

Is God involved in every event? Is he there? Yes, he is. It's called omnipresence. Can he change every event? Yes, he can, theoretically. Does he force you or someone else to choose sinful actions that bring damage? No, never. He will never force anybody. He doesn't create sin and he doesn't create sinful actions. He doesn't create that. When someone says to me, "This happened in my life. Why did God do this to me?" I say, "Really? Honestly? You're going to look him in the face and say that to him? Why did he do this to you?"

God didn't do that to you. That's sin. I've got to break it to you if you haven't watched TV in the last few days – we live in an evil, perverted, twisted world. It is wracked with sin and it is going to hell. Jesus promised us in John 16:33, "***In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.***"

Jesus has overcome the world. That's his providence, his care, his provision, and his supervision in all circumstances. There are tribulations. There are trials. There are difficulties – ones we can't explain and ones we don't want to experience. But it doesn't change who God is.

If we allow it to change how we feel about our God, then he will not be able to carry us through that circumstance. We need to hold on to God, not rebel against him. God did not cause that. He doesn't cause evil, and sinful choices bring damage. That's why they call it sin. Sinful choices come from the fall and they cause destruction.

Here's what we have got to know. God's providence says God is involved, God is at work, and God will accomplish his purpose. He absolutely will. Nothing can separate you from the love of God. God is involved, God is at work, and God will accomplish.

Here's the other thing I need you to know. Right alongside God's providence, his supervision, his care, his involvement in all the actions, all the circumstances, and all the activities of your life, you have a role. You are not a puppet. All of God's actions in your life are not without your involvement or free will. You have a free will.

You can say, "Well, how can God be guiding and directing and orchestrating things and me have a free will, too?" Abacus – supercomputer. Get it? You can move those little abacus beads as fast as you want, but you're not going to understand this. God's sovereign providence and your free will coexist and you have a role.

When you choose sin and you choose to rebel against God, there are consequences and there is damage in your life. But God is not dethroned by your sinful choices or someone else's sinful choices that impact you. God is not dethroned. He is still on the throne. He is still at work and he is still going to accomplish his plan. And guess what? He knew about

it before it happened and he was already at work before it happened. He was already there providing a way out for you. It's so hard to convey it.

Here's your role. 2 Chronicles 16:9 ***"The eyes of the Lord searched the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him."*** Do you see that? The eyes of the Lord don't search the whole earth to strengthen everybody, but to strengthen those who have made a choice – ***"whose hearts are fully committed to him."*** You want to be strengthened and fully commit your heart to the Lord. Trust me. Church doesn't do it. Ninety minutes once a week. It's full committed; it's all in; it's sold out. Then the Lord is like, "There's one. I'll strengthen him or her."

Look for your role. Proverbs 3:5-6 ***"Trust in the Lord*** (That's your role; I'll just tell you.) ***with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.*** (My daughter Danielle's life verse) ***In all your ways acknowledge him and then he will make straight..."***

Do you see that phrase "make straight"? That's God's providence. He will make straight your paths. If you will trust him with all your heart; if you will not lean on your own understanding; if you will acknowledge him in all your ways, then his response is to providentially make straight your path. That's really, really good.

What about materially? Since it's just two verses away from this verse, I had to throw the material one up because I never get a chance, really, to do it. You would say, "Why doesn't God provide for me materially?" I would say, Proverbs 3:9-10 ***"Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the best part of everything you produce. Then*** (I didn't add the word "then." It's in there.) ***He will fill your barns with grain, and your vats will overflow with good wine."***

"God, I can't give you anything because you're giving me enough to give you." God is up there slapping his eternal knee. Good one.

"Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the best part of everything you produce. Then he will fill your barns with grain, and your vats will overflow with good wine."

God is at work in the circumstance you're in. We're going to see that in Esther. God is at work. He has a plan. He has a purpose. He's orchestrating, he's leading and guiding, he's providing. He's setting something up in your life and then he's going to bring you to this crisis point where you have to choose.

God is at work in all things for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28. Any verses come after that verse? There's a verse 29. You say, "What could God's purpose possibly be in this?" I will say, not Romans 8:28. I will say Romans 8:29. ***"For those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed into***

the image of his son." Really? Are you kidding me? All of this is just so he can make me like Jesus? Yeah. It's an eternal purpose.

What if what you're going through right now is in order for you to be conformed to the image of God's Son? Is it okay? We want to be able to say, "Yes, Lord. If the purpose for this is to change me, to transform me into the image of Your Son, then I'm with you."

He wants you to be conformed into the image of his Son that he, Jesus, might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. Here it is. Do you want to know God's eternal purpose for your life? It's summarized in Romans 8:30. ***"And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."*** And it stops *there*.

What if I told you that God's ultimate purpose for you was to glorify you with his Son for eternity? And you just wanted your car payment paid, right? "Lord, please make my car payment. I don't want to lose my Buick."

What if he says, "Hey, listen. I don't know about the car payment, but how about if I glorify you with My Son for all eternity?"

"Oh, God. I don't know. I'm going to have to think about it. I really like the Buick."

That's his goal. His goal is to glorify you for eternity. Join him.

How many of you know Psalm 23? The Lord is our shepherd. Do you know that's a chapter of providence? This is all about God providentially leading and guiding and providing for you. That's his providence. He's your shepherd and so he restores you, he leads you, he protects you from your enemies, he gives you freedom from your fear, he cares for you, he comforts you, he prepares a table for you, he pours out goodness and mercy upon you, and he prepares an eternal dwelling for you.

All of Psalm 23 is about God's providence. He is at work in your life leading and guiding and caring for you. Your job? Let him. Don't fight him.

Do you know what the shepherd does to an unruly, rebellious sheep? He breaks his leg. "No really, I can fix that. Just give me your leg. Oh, that's funny. You want to be right near me now. That worked really well."

Psalm 23 is all about God's providence. The greatest providential work that God can ever do in our lives is to lead us to Jesus Christ. What if the circumstance you're going through is to lead you to a full knowledge of Jesus Christ? What if that's what he is doing? What if he's taken the pain and the tribulation and the anxiety and the unknowing and all of that so that you can fall in love more with Jesus, so you can know Jesus more, so that you can be saved for eternity and not have your sins have to be paid for by you,

separated from God for eternity? What if God is using the circumstances in your life to draw you to Himself? That's good, isn't it? That's some good providence right there. That's God leading and guiding and providing.

In Genesis 22 God has Abraham take his son Isaac up on to Mount Moriah. It's a pretty famous ridgeline mountain. He asks Abraham to sacrifice his only son. Abraham, in faith, is going to do it because he knows that God can raise him from the dead – no problem. He lays out Isaac, who is definitely old enough that he has to cooperate. He's about to sacrifice him and what does God provide? An innocent ram. He provides an innocent sacrifice and says "Abraham, Abraham. Hold your hand." he says, "So that you'll know that I am Jehovah-jireh – *I am* provides – I have placed an innocent sacrifice to die in place of your son."

2000 years later, on that same mountain, God took his own Son up. But there was no other sacrifice. God took his own Son up and he said, "Jehovah-jireh. *I am* provides." He poured out your sin on his Son so that he could provide all that he has for you because it was the only way. *I am* sees to it. *I am* provides. God has provided all that you need in his Son, Jesus Christ. All that you need.

The circumstances you're in? God is at work in the midst of them for a plan and a purpose that you cannot fully grasp. But I can tell you this. He is at work for good, he is at work eternally, and he has already given you everything in his Son Jesus Christ. Your choice is to receive it and join him or rebel and reject him. Two choices that's all we have.

Let's pray. *Heavenly Father, thank you. Lord, we know it's too big for us to fully grasp, but thank You for piercing our hearts, Lord. More than anything else, may we know that everything you've done, everything you've given us, all of your mercy, all of your unfailing love, all of your "hesed," Lord, it all comes in and through You, Jesus.*

Lord, you led me and you guided me when there was no one else to lead me, Lord. When no one else pointed the way, you pointed the way. Lord, I was running from You, but you led me. I thank you for my friend Dave, Lord, and his Catholic parents who convinced me to go to church. I thank you forever for forever transforming my life that morning.

God, we, every one of us whom you have transformed will serve you all of our days. Lord, when you put us in that place, give us the faith to join you in what you're doing. We want to be all in, sold out. We want to be part of your eternal plan. We want to be on the victorious side of this spiritual battle. Open our eyes that we can see and our ears that we can hear, and give us the faith in our hearts, Lord, to be able to respond to You. Transform us, Lord, into your "poema", your workmanship, Lord. Save us. In Jesus' name, amen.