

There are two profound, mysterious truths the Bible tells us about God—he is *sovereign* and *providential*. Now, one of the most important jobs I have as a Bible preacher and teacher is helping people unpack strange or complicated words. Let’s tackle those two words as simply as possible:

The Sovereignty of God

To say that God is *sovereign* means that God has:

1. The *ability* to do what he pleases.
2. The *authority* to do what he pleases.
3. The *right* to do what he pleases.

God is in supreme control over all aspects of the universe he’s created. He exercises his power and plans for his purposes in all times, in all places, over all people, things, ideas, and circumstances. Nothing ever has or ever will occur apart from his direct command or permission. Nothing takes him by surprise. Nothing and no one, regardless of the strength of power or will, can stop or ruin what he intends to bring about.

Ephesians 1:11 says that God is the one who “works all things according to the counsel of his will.” In Isaiah 46:11, God says, “I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.” Jesus, the Son of God, states that he possesses “all authority in Heaven and on Earth” (Matthew 28:18). As to God’s *right* to exercise his sovereign will, Psalm 115:3 says, “Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.” Because God is both sovereign and *omnipotent* (all-powerful), exercising his will over everything in the universe will never even *begin* to exhaust the strength or endurance of his mind, heart, and spirit—there isn’t a single atom, electron, molecule, grain of sand, nor speck of dust over which God isn’t *constantly* and *actively* guiding along his intended course.

Isaiah 43:13; Daniel 4:35.

The Providence of God:

If God’s sovereignty is about God’s *ability* to do whatever he pleases, then his *providence* is about what God actually *does*. To know God’s providence is to recognize that God is continuously and intimately *active* over and within Creation. This helps us avoid some common errors when it comes to what we believe about God:

1. *Deism*: the belief that God created the universe, along with all its physical and metaphysical laws and structures; however, he has essentially abandoned the universe to travel the course he laid out for it and he remains, not only uninvolved, but generally disinterested in the universe.
2. *Pantheism*: the belief that God and the universe are part-and-parcel of one another; the course of everything and everyone in the universe is an equal, commingled product of God, who is the natural world and the natural world, which is God.

3. *Chance*: the belief that everything happens randomly, with no essential cause; there's no overarching meaning or reason for why anything happens because no one's steering the ship; there's no objective *purpose* behind anything in reality.
4. *Determinism*: also known as *fatalism*, this is the belief that everything that has ever happened, is happening, or ever will happen is the result of a impersonal power or force or law we refer to as *fate*; our choices and actions don't truly matter because what's going to happen will happen; there doesn't need to be a reason or purpose behind why things happen—they just...*happen*.

Instead, the Bible shows us something entirely different about God, the universe, all circumstances, and all events—God is present and active over and in the universe he created. He's intimately—even if apparently invisibly—involved with your life, not just in some limited ways, but in every single bit of it.

If God's providence is about the things God does, then what *is* he doing?

1. *Preservation*: this means that God, in every second of every day of every year (and so on) makes sure that the things he created continue to exist; he's maintaining the material, the design, the purpose, and the function of those things; he makes sure that water continues to be *wet* and act like water; he ensures that rocks continue to be solid and hard; he's preserving the reliable predictability of the universe so we can actually live a sensible, meaningful life; because God providentially *preserves* his creation, we don't have to worry about waking up one day to doughnuts suddenly turning to sawdust in our mouths or rain clouds suddenly pouring hot coffee on our heads; Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 1:15-17.
2. *Concurrence*: this is an *extension* of God's preservation of all things; the grass doesn't grow just because God is preserving its "grassness"—instead, God is actively guiding the grass in its growth as it goes about growing, according to its nature; this means that, even though the falling rain has what we think of as a "natural" cause (*that's what happens water molecules gather in dense enough formations in the air...it falls to the earth in droplets of rain*), we need to also thank God for *causing the rain*; everything that the natural world *does* is the constant result of what God is constantly doing, as well; Ephesians 1:11; Psalm 135:7; Job 38:32.
3. *Government*: this means that, not only do things happen, but all of these events serve the directed purposes of God; the rain falls because that's how God decided water and gravity work...*and* it rains when and where God directs it because he's governing it do so for his purposes; it seems to us that God's specific, particular reasons for the vast, vast, *vast* majority of all the events in our universe are hidden from us; we *can* know, however, that all of his hidden reasons behind all things serve one supreme reason he has for doing everything: God is accomplishing "all things according to the counsel of his will" (Eph. 1:11), so that ultimately "at the name of Jesus," every knee will bow "in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10–11); Psalm 103:19; 1 Corinthians 15:27; Romans 11:36).

God has always, is always, and always will be actively beginning things, changing things, sustaining things, ending things, moving things, and causing all things. He really does have a purpose for *your* life.

Everything that you've ever done, everything that's ever been done to you, the way your body was formed and grew and changed, the way your personality works, and even every course of events in human history that led to your very existence in this time and place—he's been intimately and actively involved and governing it all.

That means you can rest assured of this: you and your life and the world around you—every last little bit of it all—*really does matter to God*. He assures us in Romans 8:28 that, for those he loves and who love him, he's (sovereignly and providentially!) "working all things together for good." You're not an accident, you're not forgotten, you're not neglected—you matter to God more than you can imagine!