

POINTING KIDS TO GOD'S PROVIDENCE

BY: WALT MUELLER, CPYU President

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The Gift of Life's Difficult Teachable Moments

What questions do your children and teens verbalize and ponder as they encounter the inevitable difficult situations and circumstances of life that come with living in a broken and sin-saturated world? When things in their lives get turned upside-down and fear of the unknown sits front and center on their minds, our kids are primed and ready to listen and learn if we are willing to use these teachable moments to help them view and navigate their circumstances through the lens of God's Word.

Life's difficulties and suffering give us the opportunity to fulfill our high calling as parents to nurture our children and teens in the Christian faith. To do so will not only help them in their present circumstances, but it will prepare them for a lifetime of walking through difficulties, pain, suffering, and heartache with a proper outlook and

understanding. What we teach them now will help them manage their fears and anxieties both now and for the rest of their lives.

As I have traveled through difficult situations and circumstances in my own life, the reality of a truth contained in the Bible from cover-to-cover has brought me a peace-filled perspective and great comfort. That great truth is a doctrine known as *God's providence*.

While some Christians think that a "doctrine" might be some kind of unnecessary human-created Christian add-on to the Bible, we need to understand that a Christian doctrine is simply a belief based on what is contained *in* the Bible. Not only that, but the word "doctrine" actually points to our parental responsibility to nurture our children in the faith. It comes from a Latin word (*docere*) which means "to teach" in order to faithfully pass on knowledge from one generation to another.





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Understanding the doctrine of providence is necessary for us and our kids if we hope to navigate difficult circumstances well. Think about how reassuring these words from theologian R.C. Sproul are for the Christian: “There is not one piece of cosmic dust that is outside the scope of God’s sovereign providence.” Working to understand the mystery of God’s providence might not lead us into an immediate and clear understanding of *what* God is doing, but it can lead us into an immediate and clear understanding of the fact that God *is* doing something for our good and His glory.

What to teach? God’s Providence!

Providence helps us answer the age-old questions we humans ask about who or what rules the world, and who or what is in control. What is *providence*? And, what can we teach our kids about *providence* in the midst of difficult moments?

Providence, as taught in the Bible, teaches us that the God who created all things does not step away from His creation, leaving it to chance, fate, luck, or fortune. Rather, God has remained continually involved with all things he has made, directing them as he wills. The Westminster Shorter Catechism teaches us that “God’s works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions” (Q.11). Your kids need to know that because of his providence, God *is* in control!

Providence teaches us that God preserves what he has made. He keeps his creation in existence, preserving what He has made and keeping it all from spinning hopelessly out of control. In Hebrews 1:3 we learn that God “*upholds* the universe by the word of his power.” He keeps his creation “being” as he intended it to be. He is sustaining, renewing, preserving, ordering, and keeping what he has made. In Colossians 1:16&17, Paul tells us that the God-man, Jesus Christ, was not only the Creator of all things, but that he “holds together” all that he has created. For example, because of providence, the law of gravity remains the law of gravity, fire is hot, snow is cold, and water is wet.

Providence teaches us that God works in the midst of all circumstances. Even in the actions we take as a result of our own individual decisions, choices, and inclinations he is at work to bring about his will and way in our lives. Yes, it is a mystery with two clear sides to it: we *do* make real choices on our own, while God *does* “fashion our hearts” (Psalm 33:15). Proverbs 16:9 recognizes this fact: “The heart of a man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.” A clear example of this fact is found in the story of Joseph. Sold into slavery by his brothers as an act of evil, God used Joseph’s circumstances to ultimately provide for his family in the midst of a great famine. God’s providence is evident in Joseph’s words to his brothers: “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Genesis 50:20). Even those actions and circumstances that are



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clearly evil are doorways for God - who is not the author or cause of evil - to work in our lives and bring us to a deeper knowledge of his love.

Providence teaches us that God directs all things in history and human actions to his appointed end. God is a "hands-on" God who cares for and loves his creation and his people. As John Calvin has said, "Nothing takes place without his deliberation." And what is his appointed end? In the larger scope of human history, God is working out his great plan of redemption to restore the goodness of his creation that was broken by our sin (Genesis 3). That plan of redemption is being worked out in history through the coming of Jesus Christ and his work on the cross as he redeems people from their sin, and it will one day result in the renewal of things. In the individual scope of our own lives, Paul reminds us that through providence, "we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). He is always at work, through good and bad, drawing us more deeply into our relationship with him, while conforming us to his will and way.

Making Providence Real to Our Kids

So, what now? How can we lead our kids into a deeper understanding of providence over the course of difficult circumstances?

First, ask good questions of each other that spark discussion.

- How have you seen God work in the good circumstances and experiences of your life?
- How have you seen God work in the difficult circumstances of your life?
- What might God be doing in the world through difficult circumstances?

Second, continually point out the reality of God's providence. Yes, it's a mystery. But God *is* at work. Here are some realities I've learned as a result of difficulties in my life and the perspective I've gained as I've studied God's providence. These are realities you can teach your kids in the midst of our current pandemic difficulties:

- God is always at work in his world.
- God's providence shows us his deep love for us.
 - We need to trust that God is at work even when we don't see it, feel it, or know the reason for what is happening.
 - I am not in control of the world. I am called to be a faithful and obedient follower of Jesus Christ.
 - "Difficult providences" are adversities that bring blessings. Even though it feels like they might undo us, God uses these to grow us. Consider the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 119:71 - "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes."
 - In his providence, God uses our difficult circumstances as his "curriculum" for teaching us what we need to know to grow in our dependence on him.
 - To find our way in the midst of difficulties and suffering we must stay centered on God's Word. Read

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God's Word regularly to gain perspective.

- Difficult circumstances lead us to the end of ourselves and into Him. It is a good thing when we are forced to stop relying on ourselves and we are driven to rely on God.
- We can gain comfort in our suffering when we know that there is a purpose and plan. . . even though we don't see it or feel it.
- God wants us to talk to him about what we are going through. Prayer is a gift. And, God welcomes our complaints, our confusion, and our cries.



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It is through providence that we are given teachable moments and golden opportunities to teach our kids great lessons about providence!

Prayers

Take time with your kids during difficult times to pray prayers like these:

"Lord, I already have enough history with you to see that my driest and poorest times have been my richest. I still dread such periods, and that is right, but help me not to give up on them or forget that you are working out great things. Amen." (from Tim Keller, *The Songs Of Jesus*, p. 206).

"Father, when you lead us into difficult seasons, it's not to punish us but to prosper us. When you send hardships, it's not to bring us harm but to give us hope. When you discipline us, it's not to send us into the 'doghouse' of your displeasure, but to guarantee our good future." (from Scotty Smith, *Everyday Prayers*, p. 305).

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