

God's Providence



SALLY MICHAEL

“Here is the God I love and worship and trust.” —John Piper

God's Providence



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BY SALLY MICHAEL



P U B L I S H I N G

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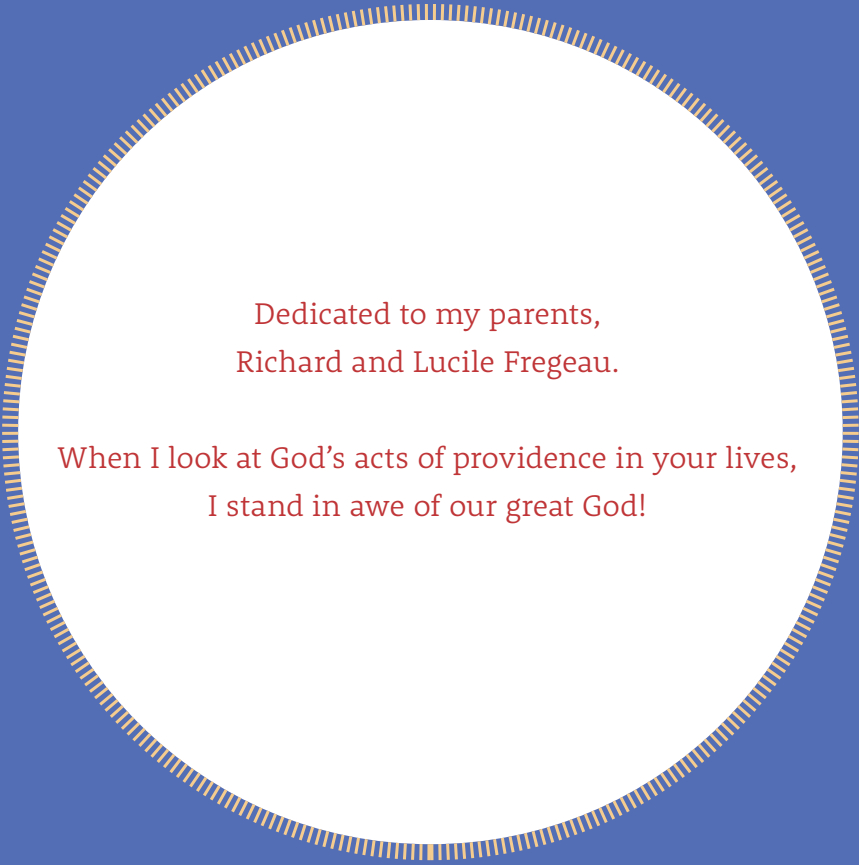
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Dedicated to my parents,
Richard and Lucile Fregeau.

When I look at God's acts of providence in your lives,
I stand in awe of our great God!



I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is none like me,
declaring the end from the beginning
and from ancient times things not yet done,
saying, “My counsel shall stand,
and I will accomplish all my purpose,”
calling a bird of prey from the east,
the man of my counsel from a far country.
I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass;
I have purposed, and I will do it.

—Isaiah 46:9–11

The LORD of hosts has sworn:

“As I have planned,
so shall it be,
and as I have purposed,
so shall it stand.”

—Isaiah 14:24

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WESTMINSTER LARGER CATECHISM (1647)

QUESTION 18

Question: What are God's works of providence?

Answer: God's works of providence are His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures; ordering them, and all their actions, to His own glory.

HEIDELBERG CATECHISM (1563)

QUESTION 27

Question: What then is the providence of God?

Answer: The almighty and everywhere present power of God, whereby, as it were, by His hand, He still upholds heaven and earth, with all creatures, and so governs them that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, all things, come not by chance, but by His fatherly hand.

God's eye is watching and His hand is working
to sustain and rule the world
to work out all His plans . . .
for His glory
and the good of His children.

Preface

*The LORD has established his throne in the heavens,
and his kingdom rules over all. —Psalm 103:19*

God's throne is in the heavens . . . and He rules over all. Everything is under His sovereign control. Every person, every circumstance, every action . . . every single thing is subject to God's eternal plan for this world. He is at work in the world every day, moving all of history to fulfill His purposes. History is *His* story—His story of *Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Return*. Every piece has been carefully orchestrated by Him and will be brought to perfect completion. What a staggering truth this is. This is the doctrine of the providence of God.

Can a child understand this? In the pages of this book you will find the words to explain this incredibly important doctrine to your child. As the Creator and Owner of this world, God has the right to rule it, and He has the power, wisdom, and goodness to rule it well. Beginning with these simple truths, you will form with your child a simple definition of the providence of God, specifically that

God's eye is watching and His hand is working
to sustain and rule the world
to work out all His plans . . .
for His glory
and the good of His children.

If a child can understand and embrace God's providence over all things, he can rest in God's sovereign care for him. How many fears, worries, frustrations, and tears will a child be spared by truly understanding and bowing to God's

wisdom? How many circumstances will be embraced with childlike trust by seeing God's hand in the everyday occurrences of life? How much grace and peace will come with the understanding that through suffering God conforms us to the image of His Son?

How reassuring is the doctrine of the providence of God! It focuses our eyes on God and establishes our trust in His providential hand in the universe, and it leads us to worship Him as we see the pieces of His eternal plan fall into place. What an amazing God we have—one who rules over all things, big and small, with power, wisdom, and love! How great is our God, who works all things for His glory and the good of His children!

Your way, O God, is holy.

What god is great like our God?

You are the God who works wonders;

you have made known your might among the peoples. (Psalm 77:13–14)

For as high as the heavens are above the earth,

so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him. (Psalm 103:11)

Introduction

How to Use This Book

This book was written to give parents an opportunity to present solid truth to their children and to encourage real-life application of the truth.

Relational

Children receive more encouragement to learn when truth is presented by a trusted individual. Your positive, relational parent-child commitment will be a real benefit when you sit down together to read this book. Your time together over the Word should be positive, affirming, and loving.

Interactive

There is a greater impact when an individual discovers truth, instead of just hearing it presented. Many questions have been incorporated into the text of this book to encourage your child to wonder and think critically. The process of discovery will be circumvented if you don't give your child adequate time to think and respond. After asking a question, wait for a response. If your child has difficulty, ask the question in a different way or give a few hints.

Questions and responses can be springboards for more questions and discovery as you interact with your child's mind and heart. The Holy Spirit is the real teacher, so depend on Him to give both you and your child thoughts and truths to explore together, and to bring the necessary understanding. Take the time to work through each story at a leisurely pace—giving time for interaction and further dialogue. The goal should be to get the material into the child, not just to get the child through the material.

Understandable

These stories have been written with attention given to explaining difficult or potentially new concepts. Some of these concepts may take time for your child to digest. Allow your child to ponder new truths. Read the story more than once, allowing the truth to be better understood and integrated into your child's theological framework. At times, have your child read parts of the lesson, giving an opportunity for visual learning.

Because vocabulary can be child-specific, define the particular words foreign to your child. Retell difficult sections in familiar wording, and ask questions to be sure your child understands the truth being taught.

Theological

More than just acquainting your child with the providence of God, this book is building a foundation of biblical theology for your child. As your child begins to correctly understand who God is and how He interacts with the world, he or she won't just have a vague notion of God, but will be able to relate to the God of the Bible.

Because the Word of God has convicting and converting power, Bible texts are quoted word-for-word in some parts. Some of these verses may be beyond the child's understanding, so you may need to explain unfamiliar words or thoughts. Even though clear comprehension may be difficult, hearing the Word itself is a means the Holy Spirit often uses to encourage faith in your child (Romans 10:17). Do not minimize the effectual influence of God's Word in the tender souls of children.

Since the Word of God is living and active, allow the child to read the actual Bible verses as much as possible. Also, encourage your child to memorize some of the verses so he or she can meditate on them at other times.

The gospel is presented numerous times throughout the book. Use this as an opportunity to share God's work of grace in your life, and to converse with

your child about his or her spiritual condition. Be careful not to confuse spiritual interest with converting faith, and take care to avoid giving premature assurances. Fan the flames of gospel-inspired conviction and tenderness toward the sacrificial love of Jesus without prematurely encouraging your child to pray “the sinner’s prayer.”¹

Application

Understanding the truth is essential, but understanding it alone is insufficient. Truth must also be embraced in the heart and acted upon in daily life. Often, children cannot make the connection between a biblical truth and real-life application, so you, the parent, must help bridge the gap.

Consider the following quotation from D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones:

We must always put things in the right order, and it is Truth first. . . . The heart is always to be influenced through the understanding—the mind, then the heart, then the will. . . . But God forbid that anyone should think that it ends with the intellect. It starts there, but it goes on. It then moves the heart and finally the man yields his will. He obeys, not grudgingly or unwillingly, but with the whole heart. The Christian life is a glorious perfect life that takes up and captivates the entire personality.²

Spend a few days or even a week on each story. Reread the story, discuss the truths, and follow the suggestions in the Learning to Trust God section. Most importantly, help your child to see that God is who He says He is, and help him

1. Some excellent resources for parents regarding the salvation of children can be found at www.children-desiring-god.org. Resources include the following: a booklet titled *Helping Children Understand the Gospel* and two seminars from the 2007 Children Desiring God conference, *How Great a Salvation—“Leading Children to a Solid Faith”* and *“Presenting the Gospel to Children.”*

2. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1965), 61–62.

or her to act in response to the truth. Point out God's involvement in daily life, and thank Him for being a God of amazing providences.

Prayer

Ultimately, our efforts are effective only if the Holy Spirit breathes on our teaching and quickens it to the heart. Pray not only before going through the stories, but also in the succeeding days, that your child would see God's character expressed in His providence over the world and respond in faith to Him.

No One Is Like God

Have you ever made a paper airplane? Paper airplanes are great—but they are only made of paper and can't compare to real airplanes. It would be silly to even try to compare the two. A real airplane is so much greater than a paper airplane.

That is the way it is with God. God is so much greater than anyone or anything else. No one and nothing compares with God. God is bigger, stronger, greater, smarter, better than anyone or anything else!

Do you know how big God is? This is the Bible's way of helping us to understand how big God is:

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand
and marked off the heavens with a span . . . ? (Isaiah 40:12)

Cup your hand, holding it open and curling your fingers. See the little spot in the middle? That is called the hollow. All the waters of the world—all the oceans, rivers, and lakes—can be held in the hollow of God's hand. That's how big God is!

Now hold your hand open. The distance between your thumb and the little finger is called a span. Measure around the outside of this book with your hand-span. How many spans does it take? In only one span of God's hand He measures the sky, all the planets and stars, the whole universe!

When you were little, you had to learn so many things—how to walk and talk, tie your shoe, add 2+2, ride a bike. . . . What about God?

Whom did he consult,
and who made him understand?
Who taught him the path of justice,

and taught him knowledge,
and showed him the way of understanding? (Isaiah 40:14)

No one taught God anything—He has always known it all! Just think of the things that God knows. He knows everything that has happened in history and everything that will happen tomorrow, next year, and forever. He knows how many grains of sand are on every beach, He knows every bird that flies in the air or falls to the earth, and He knows the cure to every disease.

What are you thinking about right now? God knows it! And He knows every thought you will ever think—all your thoughts,

your mother's, your teacher's, and the

thoughts of every ruler of every

country! He knows how many

hairs you have on your head and

every word you will ever say. What

other things can you think of

that God knows? No one knows

what God knows! He is greater

than anyone or anything else.

Guess what He knows about
the stars?



Lift up your eyes on high and
see:

who created these?

He who brings out their host
by number,

calling them all by name,

by the greatness of his might,

and because he is strong in power
not one is missing. (Isaiah 40:26)

Wow! God knows the name of every one of the trillions and trillions of stars! He shows them off every night . . . and never loses even one of them! That is how powerful God is!
Who or what could possibly compare to the Almighty God?

To whom then will you liken God,
or what likeness compare with him?
An idol! A craftsman casts it,
and a goldsmith overlays it with gold
and casts for it silver chains.
He who is too impoverished for an offering
chooses wood that will not rot;
he seeks out a skillful craftsman
to set up an idol that will not move. (Isaiah 40:18–20)

You could try to make your own god. But it would just sit there. It could not move or do anything. It would not be anything like the one true God, who did not have to be made, who always was, who lives forever and will never wear out, who speaks, acts, and works in the world. Only God is God.

Do you not know? Do you not hear?
Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?
It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,
and spreads them like a tent to dwell in. (Isaiah 40:21–22)

What does the Bible say that people are like in comparison to God? Grasshoppers! Little, unimportant grasshoppers! God made the whole world and takes care of everything in it. God is so great that, compared to Him, we are like grasshoppers.

Our God is a GREAT GOD! We should sing and shout from the highest mountaintops about how great He is. Only God is God. Only God is most great! No one and nothing can be compared to God.

I am God, and there is no other;

I am God, and there is none like me. (Isaiah 46:9)



LEARNING TO TRUST GOD

- ✦ Read Isaiah 40:12–26. What else do these verses tell you about the greatness of God?
- ✦ What things do people get so excited about that they shout about them? What does Isaiah 40:9 tell us to shout about? What good news of God's greatness can you tell to someone else?
- ✦ **Activity:** All of nature shouts about the greatness of God. With your family, carefully observe something in nature. Draw a detailed picture of what you see. What does this part of God's creation tell you about God? Start a nature notebook with drawings that shout about God's greatness.

God Is Watching and Working

When was the last time you were sick? How long were you sick? Can you imagine what it would be like to be sick for 38 years?

The Bible tells us about a man who was sick this long. His problem was in his legs. They didn't work, so he couldn't walk. The man was lying by a pool with a lot of other sick people when Jesus showed up. Other people just walked by this man. Some probably didn't even notice him—but not Jesus. Jesus saw him. He saw the legs that didn't work. He saw the 38 years of suffering, and he saw the heart of the man.

Jesus didn't just see the man and then look away. He spoke to the man and *did* something to help him. He healed the man's sick legs so he could walk again. There is none like God. Only God who heals sick legs is most great!

This should have made the people happy and ready to praise God. But instead they were mad—mad because Jesus healed on the day of worship.

But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.” (John 5:17)

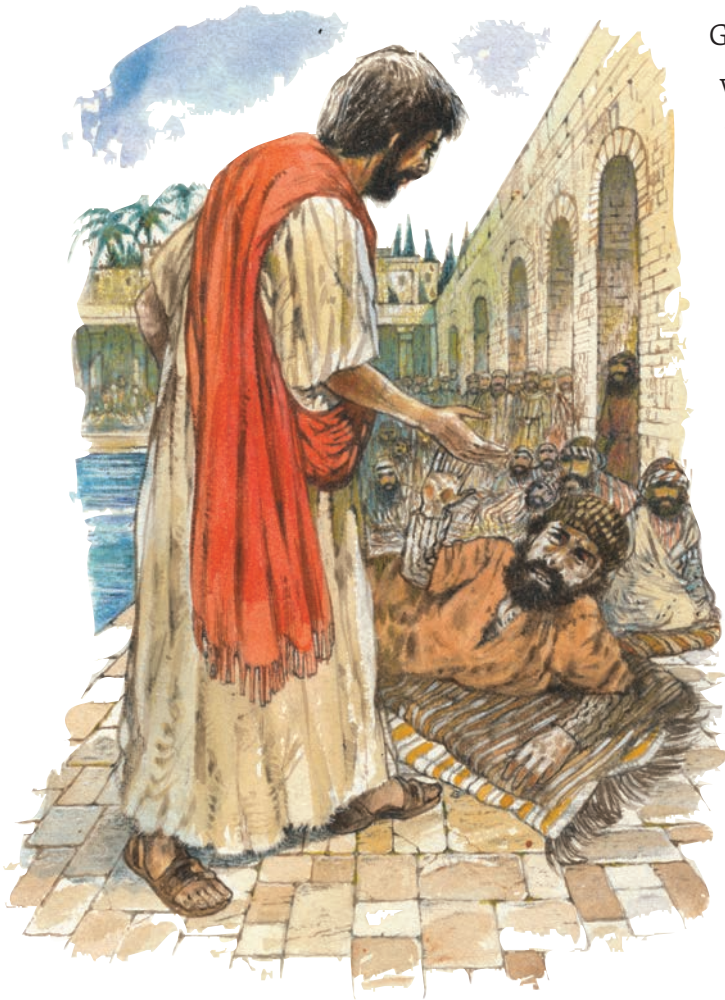
Did you know that God works? God's job is to take care of the whole world! God didn't just create the world and then ignore it. He is always watching over His world. He *sees* everything in the world—every blade of grass, every grain of sand, every joy and sorrow, every single person. And He is always working in the world, always *doing* things—making flowers grow, keeping the stars in the sky, turning winter into spring, making your lungs breathe in and out, and trillions and trillions of other things all the time. God is always at work doing things in the world.

This is called God's *providence*—His seeing and doing in the world. The word *providence* might seem hard to understand, but there is an easy way to understand

the providence of God. Just think about an eye and a hand. God’s eye is watching over the world. His hand is at work in the world. This is what *providence* means.

The Bible talks about the “eyes” of God and the “hand” of God¹:

The eyes of the LORD are in every place,
keeping watch on the evil and the good. (Proverbs 15:3)



God’s eyes are watching over the whole world, seeing everything that happens—every bird that falls, every tear that is cried, every problem, every person, every smile, and every song.

O Lord God, you have only begun to show your servant your greatness and your mighty hand. For what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do such works and mighty acts as yours? (Deuteronomy 3:24)

In His seeing, God is also doing. He is doing trillions

1. God is a spirit and does not have a physical body, but the Bible uses words like “eye” and “hand” to help us to understand who God is and what He does in the world.

of things—mighty acts every day that we don't even know about. He is at work in everything that happens in the world.

Have you ever watched your mother cook gravy or pudding? She watches it—to be sure the burner is hot enough, to see if it is boiling or starting to thicken. She is also doing something—stirring it to keep it from burning, turning the burner down if it is too hot, and taking it off the stove when it is done. Your mother is watching and working, seeing and doing.

This is what God does in the world. He is always watching and working, seeing and doing. Every story in the Bible shows us this is true. When God sent the flood, He kept Noah, his family, and the animals safe in the ark. He was watching them all the time and working for them—protecting them from the storm, keeping the boat from sinking, giving them air to breathe. He didn't just send the flood and forget about Noah and the animals.

But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided. (Genesis 8:1)

Where do you see God's "eye" and "hand" in this verse? What did God see? He saw Noah and the animals with eyes of tender love and care for them. What did God do? He sent a wind to dry up the waters so they could get out of the ark and onto dry land.

God is always watching and working. This is His providence—His seeing and doing. When you read the Bible, think about God's eye and hand, His seeing and doing. You will find it all over the Bible. And if you look around you, you will see it everywhere in the world. Every day, in everything, God is watching and working. Ask Him to open your eyes to His providence.

**From of old no one has heard
or perceived by the ear,**

no eye has seen a God besides you,
who acts for those who wait for him. (Isaiah 64:4)



LEARNING TO TRUST GOD

- ✦ Read a story from the Bible. Where do you see God's eye and hand? This is God's providence—His seeing and doing.
- ✦ Read Isaiah 64:4. What does this tell you about God? What are some things God has done for your family? Thank Him for His providence over your family.
- ✦ **Activity:** Make a bookmark with an eye and hand on it. Put it in your Bible to remind you to look for what God sees and does. Is there a need God has shown your family? Is there something you can do about it?

All parents want their children to feel secure.

How reassuring would it be for your child to know that nothing is outside God's control?

Every person, every circumstance, and every action is part of God's plan—a plan that works all things for the good of those who love him. This is God's providence, a doctrine that brings us joy even as it staggers our understanding.

Can a child grasp this important, encouraging truth?

Sally Michael believes that a child who can embrace God's providence can rest in God's sovereign care, and she uses simple truths to help you explain God's providence to your children. She moves on to show children how God's providence applies to all of life and creation . . . including themselves.

How many fears, worries, frustrations, and tears would be spared if your children truly understood and rested in the providence of God?



“My heart soars with worship and joy and zeal as I page through Sally's new book, *God's Providence*. . . Here is a foundation for life that is solid enough to sustain parents and children through the hardest times they will ever face. . . And here is practical application for children and those who love them enough to teach them.”

—**John Piper**, Author; Associate Pastor for Preaching and Vision, Chancellor, Bethlehem College and Seminary

“Sally Michael has written a primer on God's providence that is richly biblical and theological. This is a helpful resource for parents to introduce their children to God's constant watching and working in our world, and one that provides numerous opportunities for reflection and discussion. I heartily commend it.”

—**Brandon D. Crowe**, Associate Professor of New Testament, Westminster Theological Seminary

SALLY MICHAEL is the co-founder of Children Desiring God and developed their widely used Sunday school curriculum for young people. She is the Minister for Program Development and Resources in the Family Discipleship Department at Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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P U B L I S H I N G

 children desiring God

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