

# Week 49

December 3 - December 9

Acts 21:37-28:31; Ephesians; Colossians

The theme for this week is the providence of God. While there are a number of different nuances to this theological concept, the devotionals are going to focus primarily on His care for you. We will observe God's providential care in the Apostle Paul's life and also consider ways that God providentially cares for you, His child. – David Curtis

## December 3<sup>rd</sup>

Acts 21:37-23:35. "Coincidence? I Think Not!"

We don't even know his name, but the role he played in Paul's ministry was as significant as any other. He was Paul's nephew, and he just happened to be in the right place at the right time. Was it merely coincidental that this young man overheard the plot to assassinate Paul, or was it divine providence and part of God's plan in Paul's life and the life of his nephew?

Now, because this story is recorded in the Bible, it may be easier for you to see and acknowledge God's providential role. So, then I have to ask, "Do you acknowledge God's providential role in your life as well?" You may never be a famous missionary like the Apostle Paul, but that does not diminish God's love and care for you, nor is His plan for your life any less significant. Concerning God's plan and care for our lives, King David wrote, "Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed." (Psalm 139:16)

May you learn to acknowledge God's providential care as His plans for your life unfold.

## December 4th

Acts 24:1-26:31. "Rescue"

"So you see, the Lord knows how to rescue godly people from their trials..."  
(2 Peter 2:9a)

The citizens of Feldkrich, Austria, didn't know what to do. Napoleon's army was preparing to attack. It was Easter morning and a council was summoned to the church to decide what to do.

The pastor rose and said, "Friends we have been counting on our own strength, and apparently that has failed. As this is the day of our Lord's Resurrection, let us just ring the bells, have our services as usual, and leave the matter in His hands. We know only our weakness and not the power of God to defend us." The council accepted his plan and the church bells rang. The enemy, hearing the sudden peal, concluded that the Austrian army had arrived during the night to defend the town. Before the service ended, the enemy broke camp and left.

Do you trust in God's strength for your protection and in His providential care for your life, or do you trust in your own strength? May you know the power of God to rescue and defend you when trials come.

## December 5<sup>th</sup>

Acts 27:1-44. "Calm in the Storm"

"Sometimes he calms the storm, sometimes he calms his child." – Scott Krippayne

The text doesn't necessarily mention it, but I think that it is a fair assumption that Paul and his companions prayed for a safe journey on this voyage to Rome. So why was it that they encountered such a strong and terrible storm? Because God's plan was never to give Paul an easy journey, but rather to care for and use Paul in the midst of the storm.

You see, the providence of God is not like a get-out-of-jail-free card. God does not guarantee His children an easy life, but He does promise that He will always be with us (Matthew 28:20). In fact, sometimes God is even the one who brings the trials into our life in order to accomplish His plans and purposes in us and through us. Like with the Apostle Paul, God will not remove all the storms from your life, but He will use you in the midst of those storms.

Don't ask God to remove the trials and difficulties of life. Rather, ask Him for strength in the midst of it all.

## December 6<sup>th</sup>

Acts 28:1-31; Ephesians 1:1-2:22. "Greatness of Christ"

As I sit in my office and write, I am reminded that it is Veteran's Day and I am supposed to be appreciating the sacrifices made by American soldiers and the freedoms I enjoy as a result. Now don't get me wrong, I appreciate all that very much, but what bothers me are those individuals who are trusting in their citizenship as Americans more than the providential care of the God who created them and loves them.

Paul declared that Christ "is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else in this world or in the world to come" (Ephesians 1:21). Wow! History has shown us that kingdoms and nations come and go. What would happen to your faith if the United States of America no longer existed? Would all hope for the gospel and our salvation be lost? Absolutely not! Christ is far greater than any one nation.

May you remember that, "The grass withers, and the flowers fall away. But the Word of the Lord will last forever" (1 Peter 1:24b-25a). God's providence will always be there.

## December 7<sup>th</sup>

Ephesians 3:1-5:14. "Strength in Numbers"

A while back, I was watching a documentary with my father-in-law on life in the ocean. A fascinating program, it was amazing to see how the schools of fish would swim circles in groups as tightly as possible to defend themselves against predators. On their own, these fish have no defense against these predators, but as a group they can survive with minimal casualties.

As I think about this phenomenon in nature, I see a clear connection with how the church functions as an instrument of God's care for the believer. On our own, Christians can become lost, confused and vulnerable to spiritual attack.

However, God, in His infinite wisdom, has given us the community of faith, His Church, for our spiritual protection. He gives us pastors and teachers who instruct us in the truth of God's Word; elders who care for us and watch over us; and ministries which afford us the opportunity to serve and meet people's needs.

May you come to see your involvement in a church, not as a burden, but as a means for God to care for your needs.

## December 8<sup>th</sup>

Ephesians 5:15-6:23; Colossians 1:1-23. "Armor of God"

The truth that God providentially cares for His people does not guarantee that God will supernaturally intervene in our lives when trouble hits. It also doesn't mean that God will violate our own free will just to protect us in a given situation.

We have to own some responsibility for our lives and our actions. Often times I think that God's providence is a combination of appropriate actions taken by a sovereign God, and the utilization of resources made available to us by that same God.

This is where the illustration of the armor of God (Ephesians 6:13-17) comes into play. God, in His divine providence, has given spiritual resources for us in spiritual battles. It is inappropriate and actually quite arrogant for Christians to assume that God's providence means an easy life without having to prepare for spiritual battle.

May you see God's invitation to put on spiritual armor as one way in which He cares for you.

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December 9<sup>th</sup>

Colossians 1:24-4:18. "Marriage"

Recently I took some Jr. High students to a retreat. Our speaker was a single youth pastor from Washington named James. During one of the breaks in between sessions, James and I were talking about life and ministry and the subject of marriage came up. James mentioned that he feels that God uses marriage for the purpose of sanctification in our life. I agreed with his statement, and still do.

Marriage has brought about significant spiritual growth in my life, and not just that, I believe that my wife Kristi is a gift from God and is part of His providential care for me. I can't begin to count the times I have benefited from her insight and wisdom.

As a pastor, most people see me as an organized, thoughtful, and put-together individual. However, the reality is that without Kristi in my life, I am disorganized, thoughtless and basically a complete train wreck.

May you grow to see, as I have, that sometimes God's care for you is expressed by the relationships that He brings into your life. Thank you, Kristi. I Love you. – David Curtis

General Questions for each day:

Summarize the day's Bible passage in your own words.

What thoughts, actions, attitudes or beliefs are addressed in the passage?

How is the Holy Spirit leading you to apply this passage to your life today?

**Week 49—December 3<sup>rd</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>**

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Bible Discussion Guide:

When unexplained occurrences happen, are you quick to recognize God's hand in it or do you chalk it up to coincidence?

If we really believe that God has our days planned out for us in advance, then what do we have left to fear?

Do you find yourself trusting in your own strength during trials or trusting in the Lord?

Why is it so difficult for us to admit our weaknesses sometimes?

Have you ever been frustrated when God doesn't answer your prayers the way you want?

Read Matthew 6:5-18. What does it mean for God's will to be done on earth as it is in Heaven?

Are you first and foremost a Christian or an American? Why?

What do you trust in for your protection and provision in life? A job, the economy, the President?

How is the community of faith part of God's providential care for you?

How are you part of God's providential care for other people in your community of faith?

What do you expect God to do for you on any given day?

What assumptions have you made regarding God's providence in your life? Are you praying for His will in your life, or asking Him to agree with your will?

What relationships has God brought into your life that are part of his providential care for you?

Personal application: Who has God called you to care for and serve as His instrument of providential care for their life?