

A New Perspective on Providence

I have been reading the counsels Ellen White supplied to writers and editors. While I read, I have been continually convicted to write something “practical.” Given recent events, the topic of the providence of God has been upon my mind. I would like to share some of the providences of God in my life.

I was born with a severe case of aplasia cutis congenita; an absence of skin on the head. Now that I am an adult, about half of my scalp is scar tissue. Additionally, my legs are very scarred from skin grafts. As a child, I was always the odd one out. Through this experience, I learned that friendliness and unselfish concern are the keys to any relationship. Nearly every year I changed schools; and, without fail, on the first day the teacher would bring me before the class and remove my hat, so everyone could see that I was different. You can imagine the results. I became accustomed to cold treatment and learned that the attitude taken greatly affects the results. The Bible says:

“All the days of the afflicted are evil: but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast.”—*Proverbs 15:15*.

Victims will always find situations to complain about, but thankful people will always find things to be thankful for. Everything in life is shaped by perspective. Even truth can appear an error when placed in the wrong setting. I say the word, “appear,” because truth can never be error, but it can appear that way. The work of Satan is to make our lives appear filled with evil, to make truth appear evil. Ellen White learned this lesson through her infirmities as well.

“We need not be left a prey to Satan’s power.... The children of God should not permit Satan to place himself between them and their God. If you permit him to do this, he will tell you that your troubles are the most grievous, the sorrest troubles that any mortal ever bore. He will place his magnifying glasses before your eyes, and present everything to you in an exaggerated form, to overwhelm you with discouragement.... Take the Word of God as the man of your coun-

sel, and humble your doubting soul before God, and with contrition of heart say, ‘Here I lay my burden down. I cannot bear it. It is too heavy for me. I lay it down at the feet of my compassionate Redeemer.’”—*Our High Calling, 319. 2*.

As I grew older, I began to draw away from God and began to see things differently. I began to question why God would allow me to be born the way I was, why so many bad things were happening in my life. I adopted the perspective of the afflicted, and all my days were truly evil. I have learned why God has allowed such things to happen. He sees the end from the beginning. He saw me sitting in my room contemplating suicide before I was born, and He made provision by allowing a condition called aplasia cutis congenita to afflict me. Allow me to explain: After a firsthand experience in the coldness shown to those who are different, the love my parents showed to me, and their concern for my future, filled my heart with a love so strong that it could overpower the selfish desire to end my life. I realized that, if I killed myself, I would hurt my family, who had loved and sacrificed so much for me. So I didn’t do it. Instead, I chose to seek God. This is how the providence of God works. All the afflictions of my childhood would have only served to make me a better person if I had endured them cheerfully. They didn’t benefit me much because of my own course of action; nevertheless, they served unto my salvation. God knows what He is doing; whatever evil is in your life, I encourage you to adopt this perspective: “I will stand still and see the salvation of God. I am so thankful for this affliction; for I will get a front-row seat to watch the miraculous working of God as He turns this evil into something good.” Do not let Satan deceive you; he turns blessings into curses by manipulating our perspective of them.

“We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.”—*Romans 8:28*.

This is the wisdom of God, but it is foolishness to unbelieving man.

Now let's look at some examples of providence in the story of Jonah:

This story helps shape our understanding of divine providence. Jonah was supposed to obey God and warn a city; but, instead, he ran away. How did God respond? Did He give up on Jonah? Did He leave Jonah in his disobedience? Did God slay Jonah? No; He provided a storm. He caused "the lot," (*Many people, in the Bible, cast "sacred" lots in order to make decisions that they could not otherwise make with sound judgment. The Bible tells us in Proverbs 16:33 that God controlled these outcomes*) cast by the men in his boat, to fall upon Jonah; then He provided a big fish.

"Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah."—Jonah 1:17.

God gave Jonah the most epic "timeout" in history. As Jonah sloshed around with seaweed and dead fish, violently jolting as the great fish breached every two minutes, you know he wanted to be digested soon. He definitely got "car sick"; and I imagine the smell of fish at every meal reminded him of his experience for the rest of his life. God provided Jonah time to think. I can't imagine why Jonah was so stubborn that he waited three days to talk to God; but I'm sure if Jonah was acquainted with our situations, the feelings would be mutual. Jonah was vomited up as soon as he was thankful and promised to do as he was instructed. What does this mean to us? God rebukes and chastens those He loves until they recognize their sins and become thankful for His providences. Are you in a deep pit of despair? Stand in awe of God, thank Him for His wonderful providence in your life, and determine to obey Him; then ask Him to deliver you from evil. He will answer from His throne on high.

If only the story of Jonah ended here! But he was no different than us, was he? Jonah was a "Seventh-day Adventist" in some ways. He preached the first angel's message to the sailors, and they were converted. He warned "that great city," Nineveh, of its impending destruction, the second angel's message. And the entire city repented. Jonah was one of the most successful prophets in the Bible, more successful than Elijah! And what was his reaction? He was exceedingly displeased. Why? Ellen White tells us he was concerned about his reputation because his pronouncement did not come to pass. Sound familiar? Jonah was clearly wearing Satan's glasses. His perspective was so bad that he viewed great success as failure because his focus was on self. Did God make Jonah's

life smooth and comfortable to soothe his ego?

"And the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement [powerful] east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live."—Jonah 4:6-8.

God showed Jonah his perspective through this providence:

"And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death. Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?"—Jonah 4:9-11.

God asked Jonah why he was pitying a worm-eaten gourd that he made no efforts to care for. He paralleled Jonah's experience to His own. God cared about each person in the city; He labored for them and made them grow. God felt far more pity for the people of Nineveh than Jonah felt for the gourd. Jonah's pity was selfish; God's was unselfish. This object lesson taught God's perspective. God wanted to preserve the city, but Jonah wanted them to die and be eaten by worms. I wonder if the prophet recognized the message when God told him?

Another example of a perspective shift can be seen in the test of Abraham. Those who read this story often challenge God; they wonder how He could request such a horrible thing. Let us look at this story: There were two witnesses of the event, the two servants. They traveled for three days. For three days, the heart of Abraham was in pain for what was soon to happen. The son carried the wood, and the father carried the knife, to be used in sacrificing his son. The son questioned the father. When the knife was raised, it was restrained. As Abraham looked up, he saw a ram with its head surrounded by thorns. He took it and offered it in the place of his son. Jesus said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day: and he saw it, and was glad" (John 8:56). Abraham's test allowed him to glimpse the experience God would have when Jesus died on the cross. For three days, the

Father was in pain for His Son, and the Son questioned the Father in Gethsemane. The Son carried the cross of wood and the Father poured out His fiery wrath and took His Son's life when it was offered. Abraham experienced both the perspective of God and the perspective of the sinner. Relief flooded him when He saw Christ crowned with thorns, His power willingly bound by our curses for the salvation of the sons of faith. The test of Abraham was one of the greatest blessings he ever experienced.

God's providence is used to change our perspective on life; it helps us have the mind of Christ. God provides worms and scorching east winds. These experiences differ from the evil that God overrules for good—such as the experience of Joseph and the results of sin in Jacob being deceived into marrying Leah. One is a correcting force; the next is an attempt from Satan to ruin someone's life; and the third is reaping what we have sown.

It is dangerous to label something as providence, the work of Satan, or the results of sin. When Jacob wrestled with God, he thought it was an enemy; and, when we wrestle with God, it may appear to be the same. The emphasis upon perspective cannot be stressed enough. After I gave my life to Jesus, I slowly learned about perspective. There were times I accused God of being Satan. This was because God was calling me to do something I didn't want to do. I once missed a tremendous opportunity to give *Steps to Christ* to a person crying in their car because I was unsure if it was God or not directing me to do this. This is a mistake I still have not forgiven myself for. When discerning between the three, it is wise to not be stubborn in your perspective. We have to be able to recognize the providence of God in our lives. If we ask God why things are happening, I am sure He will tell us.

I would like to highlight a fourth reason bad things happen: God seeks to reveal His power in our weakness. He allows things to happen to us, so that His glory can be clearly seen. The example of this is the "thorn" in Paul's flesh. God could have healed Paul, but He used this infirmity to powerfully reveal His glory. Perhaps the purpose of your infirmity is to reveal the glory of God? It is believed that Paul's thorn was bad vision; yet he seems to be the most well-traveled of the apostles, and he was responsible for the most epistles. God's glory is revealed when we do things we are weak in. The idea of God revealing Himself through our infirmities

may be clearly seen through the account of Jesus healing the blind man. The disciples thought the blind man had received his blindness as a result of sin, but Jesus said otherwise. (See John 9:1-3.)

The story of Joseph stands out to me, especially in our time. We will soon be facing false accusations; we will be blamed for things that our accusers are responsible for. What should our response be at this time? Like Christ, we should not seek to defend ourselves. If we wait and see the salvation of the Lord, we will not be disappointed. Our Christian brothers may sell us into slavery or seek to kill us because of what we advocate. When Christ returns, He will elevate us to His throne. He has promised: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father in His throne" (Revelation 3:21). Those who are faithful, like Joseph, who constantly resist sin by saying, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9) will be exalted in due time. Their experience will have prepared them for the exalted position Christ has in store for them.

I would like to take a moment to shift your perspective from things that are seen to things that are usually unseen. About a year into my walk with God, I went to visit some of my family members. One family member lived the same lifestyle that I used to live. We had often shared our favorite music with one another before I became a Christian. One night, they offered to take me home from a walk we had been on. I told them I remembered their love for music and reminded them that my tastes had changed. They promised not to play anything but "Christian" music. However, when we were about 10 minutes on our way, they played songs I had once enjoyed listening to with them. To my horror, I heard the voice of my old master describing his plans. The first song started: "I see your record, and I want to turn it black"; and the music progressed to even darker places. I was angry at them, but was more focused on praying. As soon as I caught the message of the song, I would pray to God, telling Him I did not accept the message; then I would ask Him to protect me from its influence. Without fail, this family member would reach up and change the song as soon as I asked for deliverance. A pattern developed; after about 20 seconds of each song, I would tell God I did not agree with this, asking Him for deliverance. After a few songs, I began to be even more frustrated with my family member. I told God that I had not purposely brought myself into this situation. I kept my head down in prayer, looking at the floorboard,

4 when an unseen hand lifted my head up and my eyes rested upon a demon standing above the car's dashboard. The description of this demon does not need to live in your memory. I was not afraid; I saw hatred that I had never witnessed before in its eyes and immediately realized I was safe in Christ, because I was still alive. I noted that it was studying me with the utmost intensity. I did not stop my prayer, I recognized the message and asked for protection from its influence; immediately a look of anger flashed across its face. The demon reached down as my family member's hand reached up perfectly synchronized; they together skipped the song. Then my eyes were graciously closed to the scene. I then prayed most fervently. I did not know why God had let me see this because I had asked Him to close my eyes. Shortly after this, the music was replaced by a book. As time progressed, I learned the lesson that God wanted to teach me. I had been focused on the person, but God shifted my perspective to recognize that "we wrestle not against flesh and blood" (Ephesians 6:12). This person has no more power over their life than I had over mine, when I was under the control of Satan. Brothers and sisters, forgive them; for they know not what they do. Freedom is only found in Christ, and only if we submit to Him. All others are taken captive by Satan at his will. It is easy to look at people and think they are the cause of our problems, but the Bible teaches this is not true.

Notice the following quotes about providence:

"God has made His church on the earth a channel of light, and through it He communicates His purposes and His will. He does not give to one of His servants an experience independent of and contrary to the experience of the church itself. Neither does He give one man a knowledge of His will for the entire church while the church—Christ's body—is left in darkness. In His providence He places His servants in close connection with His church in order that they may have less confidence in themselves and greater confidence in others whom He is leading out to advance His work."—*Acts of the Apostles*, 163.1.

"Through nature and revelation, through His providence, and by the influence of His Spirit, God speaks to us. But these are not enough; we need also to pour out our hearts to Him. In order to have spiritual life and energy, we must

have actual intercourse with our heavenly Father. Our minds may be drawn out toward Him; we may meditate upon His works, His mercies, His blessings; but this is not, in the fullest sense, communing with Him. In order to commune with God, we must have something to say to Him concerning our actual life."—*Steps to Christ*, 93.1.

"God in His providence has brought men to our very doors, and thrust them, as it were, into our arms, that they might learn the truth, and be qualified to do a work we could not do in getting the light to men of other tongues."—*Evangelism*, 570.

I encourage you to trust the providence of God in your lives. He may qualify others to do the job you desire. He may allow circumstances to afflict you. He may move you from the location you want to be. He may allow your life to be turned seemingly upside-down. He may even use wicked and hateful people to do it. We are told in Proverbs 16:9: "A man's heart deviseth [plans] his way; but the Lord directeth his steps." If we determine courses contrary to the will of God, though we, like Jonah, may not realize it, our steps will be directed on a different path. God has a better plan for us than we have for ourselves. In times of confusion, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6). As a humble child, acknowledge God and ask Him what He is trying to teach you or tell you. You will discover that God has much to say to you through your circumstances. In fact, God is always speaking to us in everything we do. Let us keep our "ears" open, so we can hear His voice and give Him glory rather than complaining; then our trials will be seen as blessings. We will spend less time sloshing around with seaweed and dead fish, like Jonah, and more time beholding our salvation as Abraham saw his.

For a finished work,



Jonathan Taylor

Wisdom is justified of all her children. -Luke 7:35

More Food for the Little Flock —