



Acts – Can I get a Witness?
Wk. 64 “Learning to Trust in the Providence of God”
By Pastor Jody May 01/28/2024

Acts 18:18-23 ESV

Paul Returns to Antioch

¹⁸ After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow. ¹⁹ And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. ²⁰ When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. ²¹ But on taking leave of them he said, “I will return to you if God wills,” and he set sail from Ephesus.

²² When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch. ²³ After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

[READ THE TEXT]

Pastor – “People of God, this is the Word of God.”
People – “Thanks be to God.”

[PRAY]

[ILLUSTRATION]

Two months from now, Heather and I will celebrate our 25th wedding anniversary, and I have got to say that if it was not for God being involved in every step of the way we would not be here. We started dating 26 years ago this month, I remember for I believe it was Super Bowl Sunday, which was the 25th of Jan back in 98, Broncos vs Greenbay, where RB Terrell Davis outplayed Brett Favre’s 3 TD game, was the day I called her to ask her out. Our first date was over coffee where we got over our shyness real quick with each other when I spilled my coffee on her by my oversized hands for my body, of which we had a good laugh about. That first time date would never have happened if not for the Providence of God.



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Does that mean that God cares about who I marry PJ, absolutely He’s involved in every aspect of it. 1 year prior to our first date, Heather and I had been introduced by a friend, and at the time neither of us, I would say, was really looking for someone to date. Although Heather and I discovered we worked out at the same gym, and we would see each other out frequently for we had similar acquaintances. Well, it so happened one day we were in the grocery store together and she was purchasing marshmallows of which I questioned her wisdom in getting them for a snack. Unbeknownst to me this ended our friendship, I didn’t know this at the time, but I didn’t see her for a year.

During that year it seems that both she and I had some growing to do. We both went through some other relationship hurdles, but during that same year we both had gotten our own place and were moving on with our lives and focusing on bettering ourselves. I had a friend that needed a place to stay for few months, so I regretfully let him crash my bachelorhood. We had a pattern whereby every Saturday morning we went out to breakfast, at the same place before our gym time every week. It just so happens in January of 1998, he convinced me to go to “Rods” for breakfast and break that pattern. We went in and after 5 minutes sitting down a girl walks in and waves at me, and upon coming closer to the table I recognized the girl that ate marshmallows for a snack. We caught up, I got her number to catch up, and I called her on Super-Bowl Sunday 1998, and here we are today.

That experience provided for me the bandwidth - it stretched my limited theology - to begin to think that God was not some distant force watching me try to figure out life but that He was actively involved in my everyday affairs. By the dawning of that possibility, it started to shape my practical theology and how I lived. When I read the Bible, I would see it everywhere, when things seemed coincidental to some, I began to see them as inevitable, when bad things happened that made people question, I would see it as something that needed to be accepted. **The dawning of the Theology of God’s Providence in the daily affairs of people, is the realization that all things work together for the good of those God has called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28).** That is what propped the door open for me that when I was confronted with



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Reformed Theology or Calvinistic Soteriology, I knew it to be true, because God is the one doing the work not me.

[INTRO]

That again is what we call Providence:

Providence - *Divine providence is the governance of God by which He, with wisdom and love, cares for and directs all things in the universe.*¹

Baptist Catechism Question #14

Q. What are God’s works of providence?

A. God’s works of providence are his most holy, (Ps. 145:17;) wise (Is. 28:29, Ps. 104:24), and powerful preserving (Heb. 1:3) and governing all his creatures, and all their actions (Ps. 103:19; Mt. 10:29, 30, 31).²

Today ends Paul’s 2nd Missionary Trip, and what an experience it has been (started with the breakup, the receiving of Timothy, the visions to go to Greece, encounters at Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and lastly Corinth), and now in light of his experiences at Corinth we can see it was all under the **Providence of God**. He has possibly learned his most valuable lesson that will have an impact on his next 2 trips, of which on his last trip, he is fully aware of his death staring him in the face.

MP:

Learning to expect and appreciate God’s Providence means we learn how to accept our destiny.

Destiny means our tomorrows, means our fears, means our doubts, and it means our tears. By experiencing God’s Providence on his 2nd missionary

¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/divine-providence.html>

² <https://founders.org/library/the-baptist-catechism/> **LBCF 5.1** 1. God the good Creator of all things, in his infinite power and wisdom, upholds, directs, arranges, and governs all creatures and things,¹ from the greatest to the least,² by his perfectly wise and holy providence, to the purpose for which they were created. He governs according to his infallible foreknowledge and the free and unchangeable counsel of his own will. His providence leads to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy.³

¹Hebrews 1:3; Job 38:11; Isaiah 46:10, 11; Psalms 135:6. ²Matthew 10:29–31. ³Ephesians 1:11.



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trip Paul was prepared for the dungeons he would come to know later in trip 3 & 4 from which he could say such things as this.

Philippians 4:11-13 ESV

I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be **content** whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being **content in any and every situation**, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

If not for God’s Providence could Paul, make such an outrageous claim from a hole of a jail cell? If not for the knowledge and the acceptance of God’s Providence loved one, will you be able to accept the dark night of your soul?

Today we are going to look at three things on Paul’s trek home that I believe shows Paul’s understanding and acceptance of the Providence of God in /his life: **Displaying** the **Truth** of Providence, **Practicing** being **‘OK’** with Providence, and **Trusting** the **Future** to Providence.

1. Displaying the Truth of Providence (v. 18)

¹⁸ After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow.

Now at some point in Paul’s adventure he has come to believe in God’s Providence and has made a vow of NOT cutting his hair. Now the vow that this most likely is, or at least for Paul, it was made to emulate it, was the Nazarite vow:

Numbers 6:2-3,5-6, & 18 ESV

“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When either a man or a woman makes a special vow, the vow of a **Nazirite**, to separate himself to the Lord, ³ he shall **separate himself** from wine and **strong drink...**⁵“All the days of his vow of separation, **no razor shall touch his head**. Until the time is completed...⁶“All the days that he separates himself to the Lord he shall **not**



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go near a dead body.... ¹⁸And the Nazirite shall shave his consecrated head at the entrance of the tent of meeting and shall take the hair from his consecrated head and put it on the fire that is under the sacrifice of the peace offering.

Theologians believe that this is the type of vow he has taken, I say type because to take a Nazarite vow would mean you would have to be near Jerusalem, for you had only so many days to make a sacrifice at the temple. So, for Paul it seems like this was a semblance of a Jewish custom, that was used to mark a time of separation from his normal practices, to be an external showing to other Jews that all that was happening was under Pauls’ conviction to be Holy, set apart for a specific task, and that coincided with God’s direct intervention in Paul’s life. **Paul had a calling, the calling was divine, and Paul shows the faith in that calling by the external growth of his hair.** The culmination of the cutting of the hair was Paul’s declaring the job was done, God had said to keep preaching, He did, God was glorified, and now the sign that God had worked in Corinth through Providence w/Paul being faithful to do his part was the cutting of his hair.

The hair was a reminder to Paul and to us the reader of Luke’s Gospel, that he was learning to accept and appreciate God’s Providence, he was coming to understand his destiny.

Jesus’ belief in the Providence of God was allowing Himself to be hung on a tree, to be the light of Salvation and notification of the cost of sin. Experiencing God’s Providence in your life, if that is what you are believing in hopefully, **how are you displaying that to the world?** Do people see you displaying holiness, as God says you *be Holy for I am Holy* (1 Pet. 1:15-16).

Displaying the love for Christ in your obedience to Christ shows you have accepted God’s Providence in your life **that is your destiny**, are you there yet? If not, there are some ways you can practice that to help you be ready.

2. Practicing being ‘O.K.’ with Providence (vs. 19-20)



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19 And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

In Pauls’ story here we see three signs that you are becoming ok with God’s Providence which should be clues as to if you are becoming ok with it as well.

1st, He leaves the Dream Team behind.

We see from v. 18 that Priscilla and Aquila had come with him from Corinth, his dream team. Over the last year and a half, he has experienced the truth that **teamwork makes the dream work**. They have been by his side when he had no one, they operated a business with him when he had no money, he stayed in their home when he had no place to lay his head. These people offered a sense of stability, unlike a Timothy, or a Silas, because they were self-sufficient, they took care of him instead of him always feeling he had to take care of them. They were mature believers, and they were devoted to his work and to the spreading of the gospel. So, to me as a church planter, when he leaves them in Ephesus, I’m like, “Paul have you lost your mind!?” You don’t go play a game with your star quarterback and give away your starting left tackle with no one to take their place!

Something has changed in Paul, and it has rubbed off on Priscilla and Aquila as well. They both are understanding that they both have their own callings, and they would have to learn to trust the inclinations of the Spirit, if they saw their futures going off in different directions. But please understand that both parties here are not operating with perhaps the same reasoning that we do. They have given their lives to Christ whereby they also picked up His cause/vision, it had become their own. To tell the world of the love of God, and to receive that love, one must repent and trust in Jesus the Christ for Salvation.

Family, sometimes it may be hurtful or even scary but sometimes God will call you to leave familiar haunts, and familiar faces to strike out on your own, so that you find your place in the ministry of the Gospel, to experience His Providence in your life, and to find joy in that calling. The inclination is to hunker down, and find a safe spot to live, but the invite of the Gospel is to risk



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all you have and put it to work for God. Trusting in the Providence of God means we believe that God is waiting for us at the next stop with all we have. Do you remember how Jesus trained His disciples to do this very thing (Luke 9). He told them don't take anything with you but the clothes you have on your back and learn to rely on the Spirit through Providence to provide.

The beautiful thing about the **Gospel, is I don't have to bring my security blanket with me in this life**, the Lord God has promised to be with His people every step and is waiting for us where the path takes us, WHEN we are about doing His good work.

2nd, He leaves when they ask him to stay.

²⁰When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined.

So, you would imagine up to this point that when Paul gets a request to stay and teach in a synagogue, he would be so obliged. Whether that is because it seems people actually want them to explain how Jesus is the Christ, I mean that's his job right? OR how about the fact that he just spent a year and a half in Corinth completing a very successful ministry. Either reason is a good enough reason to be engaged in ministry, but instead Paul chooses to leave.

Paul has learned a very good lesson from God's Providence, and it is something a wise man once taught me, **“Just because it is a good thing, it doesn't make it the right thing.”** Or maybe you heard it this way, *“just because you can doesn't mean you should.”* I like the first one better. You see what guides us in our decision making should never be, *“That's the easier choice, or that is the better choice, because it suits my plans and my will the best.”*

I know that most of us go through this because I know for most people, we make decisions based on an appetite we have. I don't want to be alone so whoever is available to date is good for me, I like money so what is the quickest and smartest way to get more, I like freedom so what is the easiest and less responsible lifestyle/job I can find. Pretty soon you go down that path and what we have is a country full of people who don't want to do anything hard or anything worthwhile for their philosophy is, if it is a good



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thing then I should do it, and to them, **good was defined as what makes life easier...**

You see what was **shaping Paul’s decision making was his vow not his appetites**, the commitment to worship God at the temple first, and then secondly the desire to give his report to the church, and 3rd the mission to strengthen the other churches. What drives Paul is not the good in front of him, it is the call and vision of living for Christ, and believing in the Providence of God for what lies ahead even if there are uncomfortable things to endure. *Family right now some of your hardships may be caused by pursuing what you thought was a good thing, but it has kept you from experiencing the God thing, **which is always the better thing.***

3rd, He leaves the future up to God.

²¹But on taking leave of them he said, “I will return to you if God wills,” and he set sail from Ephesus.

Lastly, we see Paul has come to terms with God’s Providence for he is ok with leaving the future up to God. Paul has come to understand from Corinth (18:9-10) that God is the one that does the saving and God is the one that does the convincing and God is the one with the plan, so he surrenders the future of people that wanted to hear the Gospel, to God.

Family, things like this in the Bible is what helps me sleep at night. Can you imagine all the people that have come and gone through the doors of my life, that have either walked out in rebellion or have asked me continually for help when they have only refused it before. I must, as well you should too, remember the first call, it is called my **family**, I will not sacrifice them on the altar of pastoral/Christian ministry. Secondly, I remember that if someone is a part of the elect, then sometimes this church, my counsel, nor your influence is not ‘the’ answer for God is providing their answer somewhere else in a future we cannot see. The **Gospel frees us** from having to fix people, for the Spirit is the one that fixes people, and God has a plan that is bigger than us. **By learning to expect and appreciate God’s Providence we become ‘OK’ to leave our securities behind, we will know when to stay or when to go and**



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not be lured by all the good/pleasant things (appetites), and we will see where to go believing God has prepared our destiny.

3. Trusting the Future to Providence (vs. 22-23)

²²When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch. ²³After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

Well, he sails back home, and it says he greeted the church, that’s code for **“The 1st Church of Jerusalem”** and the word **greet** in the Greek means to have a **joyful reception**. It wasn’t the church having a parade for Paul or even a dinner as you would for a missionary, it was Paul who did the joyful salutation, rejoicing what he had seen God do! Can you imagine Paul is relating to the elders like Peter and John, that Jesus confirmed what Peter already knew the church would be growing, for the elect were now among the Gentiles. And after Paul strengthens the church with the good news, he leaves Jerusalem and goes back to the home base for the church expansion into Gentile territory, the church at Antioch. Then it seems he does like a tour, a celebration tour, of all the existing churches, the bodies of believers sharing with them, that God is Providentially got this!

Sharing the good news (GOSPEL) you see, ‘IS’ what strengthens the church (v.23). When we come to church to gather here locally, sometimes people always want to know and experience what God has for them today, what steps can I have to help me live a fulfilled and happy life, how do I use this thing called Christianity to get the life I want. What we see over and over again in the text it is the celebration over what God is doing, discovering His Providence, that’s what strengthens the church!³ The celebration that God is

³ In [1 Corinthians 1:4-9](#), Paul gave thanks for the Corinthians in spite of the fact that their church had a number of messy situations. Paul expresses thanksgiving for the church in Philippi ([Philippians 1:3-11](#)) even though Euodia and Syntche were having some conflict that likely was affecting the church ([Philippians 4:2](#)). Not only do we see Paul giving thanks for those in churches that he spent some time (Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, and Thessalonica), but we also see him give thanks for the Christians in Rome and Colossae – places he had never even visited ([Romans 1:8](#); [Colossians 1:3-8](#)). Do we give thanks for fellow believers in other churches and in other places? Are we thankful that we are connected to people whom we will never meet on



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in control of all things working all things to the good of His people according to His purposes. And trusting in that fact will set you up for joy as well in your life, where you can celebrate and look for God moving in front of you every step of the way.

Do you see God at work in your life, do you get excited when you hear others share their experiences about Christ in their lives, are you accepting that Christ is with you in all circumstances, even the hard ones?

[CHALLENGE]

Let me challenge you with this, like Paul, are you willing to make some type of statement to this church that you believe in the Providence of God, and you are going to work at putting your trust in Him.

Perhaps like Paul growing his hair, you need to make some type of commitment in front of this family that says I will live as if God is doing a work here, I can't see.

Display to yourself - Does your mood dictate whether you go to church or not? Can you stand being around others when you don't like your life? Are you working at **treating others more significant than yourself** even when you don't feel like it? Make physical representations of the calling God has on your life to yourself first, Jesus is worth it, so show it to yourself. Choose to pray when you don't want to, choose to sing to Him when you want to be silent, choose to feast on His Word when you want to scroll on a phone. Practice your oath to Him (Baptism) to be a disciple and do as Christ does. Jesus displays the Providence of God showing He took the worst of it. Because of His Gospel we get to display the joy of following by the public choices of obedience we get to make.

this side of eternity but with whom we actually have so much in common?
<https://wearefaith.org/blog/celebrating-thanksgiving-with-the-apostle-paul/#:~:text=Not%20only%20do%20we%20see,1%3A3%2D8>).



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Display to your family – Does your mood tell your family you are trusting God or not? Does your family see you getting mad, upset, anxiety driven over what the world gets upset over, or are you praying in front of them, confessing your heart to God, declaring His good care over their life? Make a demonstration of your trust in God even in the midst of trials: take them out, go play with them, you pray over them, shepherd them as Christ shepherded us, even as He washed His disciple's feet His last night with them under great duress. See not only to your own interest but also to the interests of others.

Display it to your church – Church members, maybe you need to commit to a responsibility in this church as a sign that you will be more serious to the other members around you about what you believe God is doing here. Perhaps you need to be the trash guy from now on, or the grass cutter, or the admin for students, or the greeter at the door, or be serious about dedicating the first part of your paycheck to here, because that is a sign that God gave it to you for the purpose to further His causes here, declaring His Providence. Maybe commit to gathering with people in our CGs twice a month and be known so that you may receive and give encouragement to the body, in humility treat others as more significant than yourself.

Display to your immediate world – Does your mood tell your neighbor that come what may, your future is secured in Christ? Do you spend your time in joining in with the complaints of those around you or are you giving thanks for the life you have? Take the time to share with others, all is not lost, you know a God that uses all things for His glory, you know a God that uses trials to save people, even as He used His son's trials to save us. Declare the Gospel by displaying God's Providence in your life, by believing everything in your life was all provided by a Loving God that has allowed all things to happen not for your destruction but so that you may be saved from it. Young people and singles commit your life unto the Lord by stop fretting over who is in a relationship and who isn't, and commit to being celibate and trust God has the person for your marriage.

Maybe we need to think seriously about how our neighbors and friends know we are Christians, so that when people start freaking out this election year



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they will know where to go for some glad greetings, who knows maybe that is all our calls in here this year?

Highlands my prayer for you as we leave Corinth today, and as we get ready for some really trying times in Paul’s life, for some trying times in our life, let’s learn to expect and appreciate God’s Providence learning how to accept our destiny in His purposes.

[PRAYER]

[CALL TO OBEY]

James 1:19-25 ESV

"Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing."

Church let us be doers of the Word and not hearers only.

[COMMUNION]

[BENEDICTION]

Go in the name of the Father, that has provided a way to bring Him glory in all things, and by Grace that means every aspect of your life, nothing is wasted.



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Go in the name of the Son, that gave God the glory in every aspect of His life, so that when we fail, we may have His imputed righteousness through His perfect obedience.

Go in the name and power of the Holy Spirit, that directs us into God’s chosen will for our lives, that enables us to accept and trust that leading into our chosen destiny, now go share that good news with others.