

## **THE LORD WILL PROVIDE**

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Lydia was raised in Tarapoto. Like many others, she moved to Lima, Peru looking for work and a better future. Little did she know what God had in store for her and many others. She visited the barrio church in Año Nuevo and after instruction from Missionary Tim Erickson she was baptized. Lydia soon demonstrated that she was very gifted in working with children. She became the teacher at the church's preschool. The preschool parents wanted her to continue teaching their children so much that Lydia became an important reason for starting the school there this year.

God also used Lydia to bring rich blessings to many others. When she heard that Missionary Terry Schultz wanted to do mission work in new areas, she urged him to preach the gospel to her family in Tarapoto. Three years ago Missionary Schultz and others made that trip. Her brother Oto and his wife Nely believed the Gospel. They owned a small restaurant in the town. Each Tuesday evening when the restaurant was closed, the missionaries held services and Bible Classes and on Sundays they had Sunday School. God also provided Vicar Ronal, who is studying through the seminary and living in Tarapoto. He married Oto and Nely's daughter Nancy.

Oto's neighbors, Ramon and Soccoro, often ate at the restaurant. They listened to the missionaries and were confirmed. They came from Pelejo, which was six hours overland to Yurimaguas and more hours south by speedboat on the Rio Huallaga. Through contacts from these two men, the missionaries began preaching the gospel in Pelejo and the Holy Spirit brought many to faith in Jesus. In time the Holy Spirit opened the door to preach the Gospel in the neighboring town of Nuevo San Jaun and in Parinari, Chayahuita villages where small groups of believers are found.

In Pelejo, people introduced Missionary Schultz to a hunter, Emilio, who took the missionary to Nuevo Barranquita, where twenty-two people were baptized in one day. By God's grace, a Lutheran elementary school was started this year. This school named "Wawaru'sa Kiskusken" (Chayahuita for "Children of Jesus") has twenty children enrolled and recently was approved by the Peruvian Department of Education.

As they passed through Yurimaguas on their way to Barranquita, Missionary Schultz met Orlando, who put him in contact with Basha and Manihuari, chiefs of the Shapra tribe in Viejo Limon Cocha. After a harrowing trip to that village, other children were baptized and the whole village begged the missionary to return soon.

All of the people who have heard Missionary Schultz preach the Gospel in the Amazon River basin can be traced to Lydia's desire to bring the Gospel to her family. However, this is not Lydia's story, but God's providential story as "God gives the increase" of souls to His Holy Christian Church.

Stories of God's providence similar to this can be found in our other foreign mission fields, home missions, and in each congregation. They show us God's amazing providence of grace, just as He promised: "So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not

return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please” (Isaiah 55:11). These stories demonstrate the truth that Samuel proclaimed at Ebenezer and that we sing:

The Lord hath helped me hitherto  
By His surpassing favor;  
His mercies every morn were new,  
His kindness did not waver.  
God hitherto hath been my Guide,  
Hath pleasures hitherto supplied,  
And hitherto hath helped me (ELH #71:1, TLH #33:1).

This essay represents a journey between “The Lord has helped us” and “The Lord will provide” to the end that we grow in our appreciation for what God does and in our trust in His loving will.

God’s providence is such a vast topic that this essay can only present a summary of what God has done to help us. For God’s providence includes every individual human being, every creature He has made, and all the non-living material and forces of the universe. It encompasses everything God has done in history, in the universe and on earth, and in God’s work of salvation. Every person is the object and recipient of God’s good providence. All the familiar Bible stories proclaim God’s providence. Even the one book of the Bible which does not use the word “God” speaks of His providence, as Mordecai told Queen Esther, “Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14). The Queen took courage and by God’s grace was able to stop Haman’s plan to kill all the Jews. As we examine how “The Lord has helped us” and believe that “The Lord will provide,” this essay will also look at the treasury of Christian hymnody, for most hymns speak of God’s providence.

Well He knows what best to grant me;  
All the longing hopes that haunt me,  
Joy and sorrow, have their day.  
I shall doubt His wisdom never;  
As God wills, so be it ever;  
I to Him commit my way. (ELH #468:5; TLH #425:5).

### **God Provides For All**

“Praise God from whom all blessings flow! Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.” These words praise the triune God as the source of every blessing. As our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, God has provided us with every good thing, as the hymn “I Will Sing My Maker’s Praises” states,

All that for my soul is needful  
He with loving care provides,  
Nor of that is He unheedful  
Which my body needs besides.  
When my strength cannot avail me,  
When my powers can do no more,  
Doth my God His strength outpour;  
In my need He doth not fail me.  
All things else have but their day,

God's great love abides for aye. (ELH #448:3, TLH # 25:3).

The prophet Elijah directly experienced the Lord's good providence. When Elijah told King Ahab that no rain would come, "except at my word," God instructed Elijah to hide by the brook Cherith. God provided bread and meat each morning and evening by means of a raven. When the brook dried up, God sent Elijah to a widow of Zarephath. God provided oil and flour for the three of them during the rest of the three-year famine (1 Kings 17).

What about the other believers in Israel during that famine? Did God help them? God provided Obadiah, who was over the household of King Ahab. When Jezebel killed many prophets of God, Obadiah hid one hundred prophets in caves and fed them with bread and water (1 Kings 18).

The Bible is filled with stories of God providing for His people through miracles or by natural means. History contains similar stories where God provided rain, protection, or comfort in many needs. Indeed, Christians of every age have their own accounts of how God has helped them. An example comes from Northwood, Iowa in the 1860s.

Pastor Torger Torgerson regularly drove his buggy to minister to people in communities which were over one hundred miles from his home in Northwood, Iowa. Once, when Mrs. Torgerson rode with her husband, they lost the trail in the evening darkness. Just as they resolved to sleep in their buggy, they heard a cow bell and found a house to stay in. Mrs. Torgerson piously said, "Those cows shook their heads for our sake." She meant, of course, that God provided a way for them to find shelter.

Neither did she worry about daily bread. Mrs. Torgerson relates, "Once we had a hired-girl who liked to tease me about my feelings that the Lord would provide somehow. One noon she came up from the cellar saying that she had in her hands the last piece of pork and the last ounce of syrup. Then she added, 'But, I suppose you have enough faith to make pork and syrup just come of themselves.' That very afternoon a farmer brought a slice of fresh pork and a jar of sorghum syrup which he had cooked himself. Nor did this happen only once. Another time at a meeting of pastors, I discovered that I had not enough butter and candles for my guests' bedroom. Next morning, without a word having been said, a man came with a jar of butter and six candles." (From the ELS Archives, written by the Rev. Erling Ylvisaker, Madison, Wisconsin.)

The pioneers were not more dependent upon God's providence than we are today. However, they were more aware of it because they did not have stores with shelves filled with food and other things as we do today. Because of the great prosperity God has given our country since the great Depression in the 1930s, people tend to take God's providence for granted, forget to acknowledge God as the source of all things, and not look to Him for help in times of trouble. May God's anger never be kindled against us because we have become ungrateful concerning His bountiful providence. Instead, let us ever sing:

O Lord, whose bounteous hand again  
Hath poured Thy gifts in plenty down,  
Who all creation dost sustain  
And all the earth with goodness crown,  
Lord of the harvest, here we own  
Our joy to be Thy gift alone. (TLH # 567:1).

### **The Definition of God's Providence**

In the Bible, the word “providence” is not used in reference to God. Nevertheless, the Bible provides a multitude of examples of how God provided for His people. Perhaps the simplest definition of God's providence is written by King David, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want” (Psalm 23:1) where the original Hebrew means “I shall not be I in need (lack).” David describes two important thoughts about God's providence: 1) God cares for me as a shepherd cares for his sheep, and 2) I shall never lack any good thing. Thus we sing:

The Lord my faithful Shepherd is,  
And me He safely guideth;  
I shall not want, for I am His  
Who all things good provideth.  
I follow Him, I hear His voice,  
In Him my Lord I do rejoice—  
Blest am I in His keeping (ELH #368:1)

The word “Providence” derives from a Latin word which literally means “to see before” or foresight. Thus, when Adam and Eve sinned, God had already determined to send His only-begotten Son to crush Satan's head and deliver the human race from sin and death. When King Saul became an unfaithful king, God already had provided another king after His own heart and directed the prophet Samuel to anoint the young shepherd boy David as the next king. Because God sees beforehand all that will happen, we can trust that “The Lord will provide.”

Providence has been defined this way: “Divine providence is that activity of God whereby He uninterruptedly upholds, governs, and directs the world which He has created” (Paul Bente, “The Providence of God,” *The Abiding Word*, II:79).

Martin Luther's *Small Catechism* describes how significant God's providence is in our lives: “I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them; that He richly and daily provides me with food and clothing, home and family, property and goods and all that I need to support this body and life; that He protects me from all danger, guards and keeps me from all evil; and all this purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me; for all which I am duty bound to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.” (*Small Catechism*, Apostles' Creed, Explanation to the First Article).

Solomon said of God, “Both riches and honor come from You, and You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; in Your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all” (1 Chronicles 29:12).

### **Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow**

The Bible teaches that God in heaven is the source of all blessings: “Both riches and honor come from You, and You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; in Your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. For all things come from You” (1 Chronicles 29:12, 14). Therefore, “all Your works shall praise You, O Lord” (Psalm 145:10), as the hymn says:

We sing the almighty power of God,  
Who bade the mountains rise,

Who spread the flowing seas abroad,  
And built the lofty skies.

We sing the wisdom that ordained  
The sun to rule the day;  
The moon shines, too, at His command,  
And all the stars obey. (TLH #43:1-2)

**Creation of all things:** God’s gracious providence began with His six-day creation of heaven and earth. The “worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible” (Hebrews 11:3). God used His wisdom and infinite power to create the whole universe with order and design. God’s mighty Word caused all things to exist. John states that the Word was God, “All things were made by Him, and without Him nothing was made” (John 1:3). King David called on the heavens, angels, sun, moon, and all the stars to praise the Lord, adding: “Let them praise the name of the Lord, for He commanded and they were created. He also established them forever and ever; He made a decree which shall not pass away” (Psalm 148:5-6). Thus we sing:

Father, in whom we live,  
In whom we are and move,  
All glory, pow’r, and praise receive  
For Thy creating love. (TLH #241:1)

God established the “laws of nature” which govern how His creation of matter and energy interacted with one another. He commanded the plants, animals, and mankind which He created to “be fruitful and multiply” and fill the earth (Genesis 1:22). By this command, God provided that His creation be maintained and be used. He had the foresight to design everything so that life could continue even under the changed conditions on earth brought about by the fall into sin and by the Flood. The Bible teaches that God created the earth for a purpose: “For thus says the Lord, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited: ‘I am the Lord and there is no other’” (Isaiah 45:18).

### **God’s Providential Rule**

The second verse of Johann Schultz’ hymn “All Praise to God, Who Reigns Above” declares,

What God’s almighty power hath made,  
His gracious mercy keepeth;  
By morning dawn or evening shade  
His watchful eye ne’er sleepeth;  
Within the kingdom of His might,  
Lo, all is just and all is right,  
To God all praise and glory! (ELH #435:2, TLH 19:2)

The God who created the world is the God who preserves it. God was not like the maker of a grandfather clock or like the builder of a house. For their work is purchased by others and its maker has no more concern about it. The Bible states that Jesus “upholds all things by the word

of His power” (Hebrews 1:3). When David stated that God “made a decree that shall not pass away” he was speaking about God’s providential care of His creation.

God’s providence involves all creatures on earth as recipients of God’s care and blessings. No creature could live without God’s help, “since He gives to all life, breath, and all things” (Acts 17:25). Conversely, the Bible says, “You hide Your face, they are troubled; You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust” (Psalm 104:29). God cares about all people, as Jesus stated, “He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:45). His providence encompasses everything from the smallest meteor to the largest galaxy, from the beginning of time to the Last Day, from the minutest bacteria to the human race.

Not all have agreed with this teaching. The Church father Jerome once wrote, “It is an absurd detraction of the majesty of God to say that God knows every moment how many gnats are born on earth and how many die; how many bedbugs, fleas, and flies there are on earth, what number of fishes live in the water. We are not such fatuous sycophants of God that while we make His power concern itself with most insignificant affairs, we are unfair to ourselves by assuming a like providence extending over rational and irrational creatures.” Francis Pieper comments that Jerome “fears that men might not receive the attention due them if God concerned Himself also about the small irrational creatures individually.” However the Church fathers settled this question with the Scriptural axiom: “If it was not unworthy of, and improper for, God to create even the minutest creatures, much less can it be improper for Him to rule over what He created” (F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol 1, pages 485-486). God rules over all things so that nothing happens without God knowing it and allowing it to happen. For Jesus said, “Not one of the [sparrows] falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will” (Matthew 10:29).

Jesus Himself is the ruler of the world. For the Son of God who came to rescue the world of sinners is the same Son of God and Son of Man who rules over all things. *The Augsburg Confession* states, “Afterward [Jesus] ascended into heaven to sit on the right hand of the Father, forever reign, and have dominion over all creatures...” (Tappert, *Book of Concord*, Augsburg Confession, III [The Son of God]:4, Latin, p. 30). Jesus’ rule is described by St. Paul: “And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church” (Ephesians 1:22). The implied promise in this verse is that Jesus rules over every aspect of the events of the world for the benefit of believers.

God rules over His creation so that 1) all things serve His purpose, 2) Satan cannot destroy the Holy Christian Church, 3) His promises are kept, and 4) life may be preserved as long as God allows the world to continue. After the Flood, God promised Noah, “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease” (Genesis 8:22). This promise was not just a prediction of what will happen. God provides the very means to make His promises remain true.

During the 1950s and 1960s, scientists were making dire predictions about nuclear warfare ending life on the earth. The theory was that atomic bombs would put so much dust in the atmosphere as to block the sun’s rays, which would cool the earth and kill the vegetation that had not been destroyed by radioactive fallout. The fact that such warfare did not happen is due to God’s providential care to keep His promises made to Noah. God’s children did not have to worry that life on earth was going to end in this way.

## God's Attributes and His Providence

Who is this God who “made me and all creatures...and still preserves them”? Can we trust that God’s stewardship of His creation will continue? Can we expect only good from our heavenly Father? During Epiphany we sing, “Hail Thou Source of every blessing Sovereign Father of mankind!” (TLH # 129:1). Another hymnwriter states,

Thy ways, O Lord, with wise design,  
Are framed upon Thy throne above,  
And every dark and bending line  
Meets in the center of Thy love. (TLH #530:1).

### ***Omnipotent (All Powerful)***

Because God is almighty, He can do all things to provide for His creatures. As Job said, “I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You” (Job 42:2). The angel Gabriel told Mary, the mother of Jesus, “With God nothing will be impossible” (Luke 1:37).

Moses and the Children of Israel saw God’s almighty power open the Red Sea and then descend on Pharaoh’s army. Moses then praised God’s almighty power: “Your right hand, O Lord, has become glorious in power; Your right hand, O Lord, has dashed the enemy in pieces” (Exodus 15:6). In the world, God’s providential power “does not operate in or upon our faith but above, over, around us, upon our enemies. It saved Daniel in the lion’s den, the three men in the fiery furnace, set bounds for Satan in afflicting Job, freed Peter from Herod’s prison, preserved Paul amid dangers, hardships, persecutions, etc. Great and wonderful is this protection of omnipotence, without which we should soon be overwhelmed” (Lenksi, *1 Peter*, pages 35-36). God’s almighty power accomplished His greatest miracle, as the angel Gabriel told Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born of you will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

As we study the miracles of Jesus and see how God worked to accomplish His will, we ought to conclude that God is able to do anything to provide for and protect His people; for Jesus said, “with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

### ***Wisdom***

God possesses both power and wisdom, as David says, “Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite” (Psalm 147:5). All of creation declares God’s wise design, as David again says, “O Lord, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all” (Psalm 104:24). His wise son, Solomon, declared, “The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens” (Proverbs 3:19). Solomon has Wisdom say, “When He prepared the heavens, I was there...I was beside Him as a master craftsman; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing in His inhabited world” (Proverbs 8:27, 30). We can trust God to provide just what is needed because of His wisdom.

### ***Omniscient (Knowing all things)***

Along with wisdom, God knows all things. The Psalmist declared, “The Lord looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men. From the place of His dwelling He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth; He fashions their hearts individually; He considers all their works”

(Psalm 33:13-15). And David declared, “O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether” (Psalm 139:1-4). Thus the Lord knows how to care for His people and deliver them from all trials.

### ***Good and Merciful***

God’s providence also shows that He is good and merciful. The hymnist prayed:

O Thou from whom all goodness flows,  
I lift my heart to Thee;  
In all my sorrows, conflicts, woes,  
Dear Lord, remember me.” (TLH 515:1).

God proclaimed His goodness to Moses on Mt. Sinai: “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Exodus 34:6-7). Though the prophet Jonah wanted to see God destroy his enemies, the Assyrians of Ninevah, God told him, “Should I not have pity on Ninevah, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?” (Jonah 4:11). King David declared, “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever” (Psalm 103:9-10). Again, “The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord” (Psalm 33:5).

Evil, sin, affliction, sorrow, wickedness, disease, and death abound and cause many people to deny the goodness, power, and knowledge of God. Even when trials seem to contradict God’s goodness, the Bible says, Don’t “be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens” (Hebrews 12:5-6). For God promises to turn all evils into good for those who believe on Jesus as their Savior.

Paul Bente demonstrates the implications for those who reject God’s good providence: “If God does not govern the world according to His will, it must be due to one of four reasons:

1. God is remote from the world—then He is not omnipresent;
2. God is near to the world but knows nothing of the world—then He is not omniscient;
3. God knows of the world but is unwilling to interfere in the course of the world—then He is morally indifferent, cares neither for right nor wrong;
4. God would like to interfere, but is unable to do so—then He is not omnipotent.”

(The Providence of God” by Paul Bente, *Abiding Word*, p. 79).

What a blessing it is that the true God is almighty, all-knowing, filled with wisdom, goodness and mercy. We can trust Him to give us all good things, as James wrote: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17). Therefore the Psalmist declares, “My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep” (Psalm 121:2-4).

## God's Mercy Keeps His Creation

God's providence extends to all creation. The prophet Nahum stated, "The Lord has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, and dries up all the rivers" (Nahum 1:3b-4a). The Bible clearly states that God uses His creation to provide good or to bring disaster to the world. Therefore we sing,

Thy bountiful care What tongues can recite?  
It breathes in the air, It shines in the light,  
It streams from the hills, It descends to the plain,  
And sweetly distils In the dew and the rain (TLH #17:4).

**Providence and the universe:** God knows the universe and uses it for His ends. Just as God numbers all the hairs of our head, the Bible states, "He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name" (Psalm 147:4-5). Consider what this means when scientists estimate that each major galaxy contains one billion stars—and there are one billion galaxies. God is the Lord "Who gives the sun for a light by day, the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, who disturbs the sea, and its waves uproar" (Jeremiah 31:35). When the Lord delivered the Amorites into the hands of Israel, Joshua said, "Sun, stand still over Gibeon." "So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and did not hasten down for about a whole day" (Joshua 10:13). When King Hezekiah prayed for longer life, God gave him a sign, "I will bring the shadow on the sundial...backwards ten degrees" (Isaiah 38:8). God also created a special "star" in the sky to announce to the Magi that the Messiah was born. However, God has not written His providence in the stars that we should trust in their influence. Astrology is a sin against the second commandment.

**Providence and nature:** God directs and uses nature to accomplish His will. Joel told the people of Israel: "Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God: For He has given you the former rain faithfully, and He will cause the rain to come down for you. Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel: I am the Lord your God and there is no other" (Joel 2:23,27). Paul also spoke of God's good purpose by His providence: "Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17). We confess in the *Large Catechism*: "If God did not cause grain to grow and did not bless and preserve it in the field, we could never take a loaf of bread from the oven to set on the table." (Tappert, p. 430, *Large Catechism*, Part Three: 4<sup>th</sup> Petition:72). The farmer who plants the seed cannot make it grow, God does that. Botanists have counted over 250,000 species of plants, all of which God cares for.

Each day God provides so that the world supports life for all of God's creatures. David said, "The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing" (Psalm 145:14-16). Another Psalm declares, "He sends the springs into the valleys; they flow among the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst, by them the birds of the heavens have their home; they sing among the branches. He waters the hills from His upper chambers; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of Your works. He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the service of man, that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine that

makes glad the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread which strengthens a man's heart" (Psalm 104:10-15). Luther declares:

He makes all creation help provide the comforts and necessities of life—sun, moon, and stars in the heavens, day and night, air, fire, water, the earth and all that it brings forth, birds and fish, beasts, grain and all kinds of produce. Moreover, he gives all physical and temporal blessings—good government, peace, security. Thus we learn from this article that none of us has his life of himself, or anything else that has been mentioned here or can be mentioned, nor can he by himself preserve any of them, however small and unimportant. (Tappert, p. 412, *Large Catechism* Part Two: 1<sup>st</sup> Article:14, 16 (page 412).

**Providence and history:** God directs the history of the world to accomplish His will. Standing before the philosophers of Athens, Paul declared, "He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; For in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:26-28). Job declared of God, "He makes nations great, and destroys them; He enlarges nations, and guides them" (Job 12:23).

Long before Cyrus, King of Persia, was born, God prophesied through Isaiah: "Thus says the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held—to subdue nations before him and loose the armor of kings" (Isaiah 45:1). Two hundred years later, the night before Cyrus captured Babylon, Daniel told Belshazzar regarding God's writing on the wall, "O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. The God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified. Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians" (Daniel 5:18,23, 28). Through Cyrus, God allowed a remnant of Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. For God intended that the Messiah be born in the land of Promise.

**Providence and the individual:** Each human being is the object of God's providence as well as His tool to help others. God raised Nebuchadnezzar to great power and used his kingdom to chastise the believers in Judea and punish those who worshiped other gods. God's providence raised Daniel and his three friends into positions of power in Babylon. Through their work and testimony, God blessed Nebuchadnezzar and further instructed him to know who the true God was.

God also revealed His foreknowledge and grace to Jeremiah: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). God directed a special promise to the believers in Israel: "Listen to Me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been upheld by Me from birth, who have been carried from the womb: Even to your old age, I am He. And even to gray hairs I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear; Even I will carry, and deliver you" (Isaiah 46:3-4). One can trace how God has led men such as Luther, Walther, Preus and Koren to carry out that work for which He had appointed and equipped them.

When we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," the *Small Catechism* lists some of what God provides: "Daily bread includes everything needed for this life, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, fields, cattle, money, goods, God-fearing spouse and children,

faithful servants and rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, order, honor, true friends, good neighbors, and the like.” (*ELS Explanation*, Fourth Petition).

God is the true source of every blessing, even when He uses agents such as nature, governments, and people to give them to us or make them available. We praise God from whom all blessings flow and ask Him to keep us each day.

### **God Moves In a Mysterious Way**

Though the Bible shows how God’s guiding hand works in world history and the daily activities of believers; and though God’s Word declares that Jesus “upholds all things by the word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3), human beings will not be aware of the many ways in which God guides, protects, and cares for them. For example, people cannot see the angels that God sends to serve His children. Yet they are to believe God’s Word concerning His angels: “Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14). Again, “The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them” (Psalm 34:7).

This truth was impressed upon Elisha’s fearful servant when he saw the town surrounded by Syrian horses and chariots. Elisha prayed that God would open his eyes. “Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha” (2 Kings 6:17). Generally people do not see God’s protection in such a dramatic fashion. The hymn below aptly describes God’s hidden providence:

God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants His footsteps in the sea  
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never-failing skill  
He treasures up His bright designs  
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;  
The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy and shall break  
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His grace;  
Behind a frowning providence,  
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower. (ELH #434, TLH #514)

### **A. God's hidden providence**

God's providence of our "daily bread" is often hidden from us. Job said that God, "does great things, and unsearchable, marvelous things without number. He gives rain on the earth, and sends waters on the fields" (Job 5:9-10). Under the First Commandment Luther describes some ways in which God gives us all good things,

Although much that is good comes to us from men, we receive it all from God through his command and ordinance. Our parents and all authorities...have received the command to do us all kinds of good. So we receive our blessings not from them, but from God through them. Creatures are only the hands, channels, and means through which God bestows all blessings. For example, he gives...grain and all kinds of fruits from the earth for man's nourishment--things which no creature could produce by himself" (Tappert, *Book of Concord*, Large Catechism, Part One, 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment: 26, page 367).

Martin Luther commented on God's hidden/paradoxical ways by using the concept of "masks." That is, God "conceals His eternal mercy and loving-kindness behind His eternal wrath: His righteousness, behind apparent iniquity. This is the highest degree of faith—to believe that He is merciful, who saves so few and damns so many" (Richard Baepler, "Providence in Christian Thought," *The Caring God*, page 57; quote from Luther's *Bondage of the Will*).

If God did not hide behind such masks, humans would be like the 5,000 people Jesus fed, who wanted to make Him their king so He could give them all they desired that they did not have to work for it. Because God hides His providential work, the world does not recognize Him or His work. Solomon declared, "[God] has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end" (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

Though God certainly moves in mysterious ways, yet we can be confident that He desires to give His chosen children every good thing. St. Paul wrote: "To [His saints] God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:26-27). In his great hymn of praise to God, St. Paul states, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33).

### **B. Blind Unbelief is sure to err**

Blind unbelief is sure to err  
And scan His work in vain;  
God is His own Interpreter,  
And He will make it plain. (ELH #434:3b, TLH # 514:6)

To the unbeliever, God's creation and providence is a mystery entangled in hopelessness. People may be aware of God's goodness to them, since St. Paul told the Athenians that God gave life to all, made all people of one blood, and determined the borders of each people "so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27). However, unbelief misinterprets the significance of God's goodness.

On the one hand, unbelief may view God's goodness as approval of their sins or error and, conversely, will judge the adversity that may happen to the Christian as evidence of God's wrath and punishment.

On the other hand, unbelief may think of God's providence as a contract: If people faithfully serve God, He will bless them and punish those who do evil. Certainly God does bless those unbelievers who outwardly follow the precepts of the Ten Commandments (civic righteousness). The Bible also says, "The Lord preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy" (Psalm 145:20). The pagan world in which St. Paul preached felt the necessity of pleasing their gods in order that they might receive good fortune. However, Christians confess in the first article of the Creed, "And all this purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me."

Still others may consider that their wealth, fame, or influence is solely due to their own skill and efforts. The Psalmist complains that "all the workers of iniquity boast in themselves" and say, "The Lord does not see, nor does the God of Jacob understand" (Psalm 94:4,7).

Some "monstrous people" have gained great power, become wealthy or famous by their skill. Conversely, many innocent people have suffered under human disasters such as war, slavery, and oppression. One unbeliever wrote, "If God exists, then He has chosen cunningly to hide His existence from most of His creatures. Indeed a physicist once noted that things make more sense if you assume the world was created not by an all-good and all-powerful being, but by one that is 100 percent malevolent yet only 90 percent effective" (abstract from "The Hedonistic Imperative: Heaven on Earth?"). Unbelief does not see the God of grace and mercy who is long-suffering toward those who reject Him and His word.

Other false ideas about God's providence have tried to resolve the mystery regarding evil in the world. **Deism** treats God as the Creator but not as the Preserver. God set the universe and its laws in motion and then let it go like a machine. **Fatalism** sees everything moving toward a fixed end with no room for a loving purpose or individual worth. To the fatalist, all is meaningless, merciless, and hopeless. **Pantheism** teaches that god is present in all actions and everything is god. Thus there is no sin and no individuality. **Mysticism** sees god as totally other than His creation. God and His providence is always unknowable and there is no certain purpose to anything (Pastor Rob Burridge "Survey Studies in Reformed Theology," 1997). **Atheism** reduces the universe to a mere mechanism, and **Darwinism** tries to explain nature with evolutionary concepts where God is not active at all. **Stoicism** teaches its followers to unemotionally accept "what will be will be" and **Epicureanism** teaches that god left his creatures to function as they may since god is too busy enjoying himself and does not care (Markus Koepsell, "Divine Providence and Human Adversity", page 1).

The Formula of Concord rejects the following statements about God's providence: "The absurdity of the Stoics and Manichaeans in holding that everything must happen as it does; that man acts only under coercion; that even in external works man's will has no freedom or power whatever to achieve a measure of external righteousness and honorable behavior and to avoid manifest sins and vices; or that the will of man is coerced into doing such wicked acts as lechery, robbery, and murder." (Tappert, p. 535, *Formula of Concord*, Solid Declaration, Article II, Free Will: 74).

God's providence has not been affirmed in modern works of secular history as it has been in the past. "The impact of the natural sciences was one of the factors in diminishing the

traditional belief in God's sovereignty. Men accepted the evolutionary process as a substitute for creation" ("The Concept of Providence in Modern Historical Thought", Carl S. Meyer, *The Caring God*, p. 159). For the past two hundred years, historians have ruled out theological presuppositions of history based on God's providence (Ibid., p. 160). So, while recent surveys show that evolution has not captured the hearts and minds of ordinary Americans, the "scientific age" has largely eliminated in the minds of many the teaching that God controls all things.

Many who call themselves Christians today believe that the most momentous events occur by chance. They reject the idea that hurricanes, tornadoes, floods and other disasters can be called "acts of God." For their god rewards those who follow his will and punishes the wicked.

Other Christian books are in fact semi-fatalist: "Divine Providence is God's sovereign rule over all things. It is God's government of his creation" ("The Good Providence of our God," Chapter 36, [www.freegrace.net/dbooks](http://www.freegrace.net/dbooks)). Another author almost admits belief in fate: "The idea that events occur as a result of fate or mechanical necessity has something in common with the true doctrine of Providence, i.e., that events are determined. The similarity stops there however. If events are at the mercy of blind necessity and fate, then there is no meaning, no hope. But if a personal infinite God has ordered and decreed all that takes place then he has done so for His own glory and for the good of His people" (Fred L. Pugh, "God's Works of Providence in History", page 1, [www.natreformassn.org/provhist](http://www.natreformassn.org/provhist)).

While it is true that God's will from eternity must be done, His will cannot be determined by the individual without a clear word of promise in the Bible. Some Christian help books advise that the Christian must find God's plan for his or her life, lest he or she go against God's plan and be punished. But the Scripture asks, "Who has known the mind of the Lord?" (Romans 11:24). God's rule and will is often hidden from people. His providence and will can be understood by studying Scripture and seen by knowing the history of the world.

Unbelief concludes that if God had ordered and decreed all that takes place then God must be the author of evil or that He is cruel. Others object on different grounds:

1. If God controls everything, then I am not responsible for what I do. [Yet the Bible holds sinners responsible for their evil deeds even when God has prophesied that they will do such deeds. Judas' betrayal of Jesus and Pharaoh's hardness of heart are noteworthy examples.]
2. If God controls everything, then things will turn out the same no matter what I do. [Such a statement is fatalism. God uses the actions of individuals to accomplish His will. Jesus commands believers to pray and promises to answer.]
3. If God controls everything, then He must be the author of sin. [However, God's Word states, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone" (James 1:13). God is holy, it is impossible for Him to do evil or cause it. God has not revealed why He allowed Satan's rebellion and his temptation of Adam and Eve. But sin came as a result of their evil deeds, not God's. To correct the evil they brought into the world, God determined from eternity that Jesus would die on the cross. In a prayer, the early followers of Christ stated, "Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done" (Acts 4:28) Nevertheless, Peter's earlier sermon declared, "You denied the Holy One...and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses" (Acts 3:14-15). While we cannot understand this paradox, both of Peter's statements are true.]

- 4 If God controls everything, how do you account for the sins of the righteous, and the prosperity of the wicked? [Sin still remains in believers, and all will be set right at judgment day.] ([www.Providence/20Objections](http://www.Providence/20Objections)).

### ***C. The problem of evil***

The mystery about God's providence is especially difficult for us to understand when trying to deal with the question of why there is so much human misery, suffering, terrorism, and wicked oppression in the world. For on the one hand, Psalm 91 promises, "Because you have made the Lord, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone" (Psalm 91:9-12). If this promise is true, and it is, why should God allow His prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah to suffer gruesome deaths? Why should Stephen and James die so young when they could have proclaimed God's Word to so many more people? And why should Saul the persecutor live, and the believers die whom Saul captured?

When God's children suffer acute affliction, lingering pain, deep sorrows, persistent persecution, and horrible death, the devil often tempts them and others to doubt either God's goodness or their own faith. As an example of such thinking, Jesus' disciples once saw a man who was blind from birth. They asked Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus replied, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him" (John 9:2-3). Not all suffering is a result of our sins. In this case, when Jesus healed the blind man, he testified before the Sanhedrin that Jesus was of God.

Job's three friends counseled Job to confess his sin and God would heal him. Job replied in part that "the arrows of the Almighty are within me. Have I sinned? Why have you set me as Your target?" (Job 7:20). God's reply to Job proclaims that God is over all and that man has no right to doubt Him: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him?" (Job 38:4; 40:2). God does not tell Job why he suffered such afflictions. God simply wants His children to trust in His good, but at times mysterious, will.

**Evil and God:** Though nothing happens without God allowing it to happen, God is not the author of evil. Evil and sin are the work of Satan. God gives power, strength, and breath to His creatures. They are responsible for their sinful actions. Our Lutheran Confessions declare:

The source and cause of evil is not God's foreknowledge (since God neither creates nor works evil, nor does he help it along and promote it), but rather the wicked and perverse will of the devil and of men, as it is written, "Israel, thou hast plunged thyself into misfortune, but in me alone is my salvation" (Hos. 13:9). Likewise, "Thou art not a God who delights in wickedness" (Ps. 5:4)" (Tappert, page 617, *Formula of Concord*, Solid Declaration, Article XI, Eternal Foreknowledge and Divine Election: 7).

God's children are not to think that God will necessarily deliver them from natural disasters or human war. For when people assume that God protects the good, then they implicitly conclude that those who suffer must be evil. However, Jesus taught us to pray, "Deliver us from evil." We are asking God to "deliver us from every evil of body and soul, property and honor... and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven" (*Small Catechism*,

Seventh Petition). At times, God does allow His children to be swept away by war, oppression, storms, and disease. They should take every precaution to avoid disasters if possible. They should consult physicians when they become sick, but trust that God's will be done. Christians are to conclude that God's good providence is at work especially when through death He removes them from further suffering.

**Evil and believers:** During trials and afflictions, God's children are to trust that God allows these difficulties for their good and that God will deliver them, even if it means that He takes them to heaven. Peter wrote, "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment" (2 Peter 2:9).

Since God desires to give His children only good things, even the sorrows they encounter in this life God will turn into good. When Saul persecuted the believers in Jerusalem, many went to Samaria teaching the Gospel to the people. Enduring persecution for the sake of Jesus testifies to the Christian's faith in God's promises of salvation. God can use their testimony to bring even the enemies of the Gospel to faith.

Sometimes God allows sorrows to happen to His children to train and chastise them so that they grow in faith. The Bible says, "Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11). Sometimes chastening reminds us of our sin, sometimes we learn to trust God more, sometimes He wants us to seek God and His righteousness more than the world's goods, and sometimes we will know only in heaven what God intended. The apostle James states, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (James 1:2-3). Regarding his "thorn in the flesh," Paul declared, "I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9b-10).

**Evil and unbelievers:** It is often true that believers suffer while the wicked prosper. Job said, "The tents of the robbers prosper, and those who provoke God are secure—in what God provides by His hand" (Job 12:6). When Asaph saw this he wrote, "My steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (Psalm 73:2b-3). Why did the wicked receive good when they should have been punished? Asaph confessed, "When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me" (Psalm 73:16). Then in the Temple the Psalmist understood: "You cast them down to destruction." God will deal differently with His children: "You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory" (Psalm 73: 18b, 24; See also David's instruction in Psalm 37).

Though our country is presently experiencing terrorism and war, our trust in God should not waiver. Twenty years ago the news was not much different than what we hear today. In his essay to the 1981 ELS convention, Pastor James Olsen listed some events which occurred at that time:

What a grim year was the introductory year of the 1980's! Did it set the tone for the entire decade? As the year 1980 closed, the world scenarios of grimness showed Cambodia being starved out of existence; 9,000 dead in El Salvador's civil torment; terrorists killing scores in Italy; political violence taking the lives of 2,000 in Turkey. Afghanistan began the decade as a

prisoner of the “liberating” neighbor to the north; troops came to Poland’s borders in case that country should need “liberation.

...Mt. St. Helens erupts leaving dozens uncounted dead and millions of dollars worth of damage. An earthquake in Italy takes 3,000 lives, another in Algeria the same toll. And the attempt on the life of President Reagan. Can it be stopped? Who is in control? God is, He is for us —through the cross. (“God is For Us in the 1980s” James Olsen, ELS 1981 *Synod Report*, p. 46).

This quote from the past reminds us of events we may have easily forgotten. Think of the many thousands of lives that were affected by those events. God’s good providence has kept us from many of these terrible disasters so that we tend to forget just how much He has blessed us along our way. As we bless God for protecting us from evil, we need to praise Him for providing for the salvation of our souls.

### **God Provided Our Salvation**

Not only has God kept us from all evil and provided us with all that we need for this body and life, God also provided for our salvation, as the *Large Catechism* states, “For here we see how the Father has given himself to us, with all his creatures, has abundantly provided for us in this life, and further, has showered us with inexpressible eternal treasures, through his Son and the Holy Spirit” (Tappert, p. 413, *Large Catechism*, Part Two: 1<sup>st</sup> Article:24). So great are these treasures that we cannot praise God enough for what He has given us in Jesus Christ.

Let the earth now praise the Lord,  
Who hath truly kept His word  
And the sinner’s Help and Friend  
Now at last to us doth send. (ELH #165:1, TLH #91:1)

**Salvation promised:** Because of Adam and Eve’s original sin in the garden, only God Himself could save the world from eternal death, provide redemption for sin, and defeat the power of the devil. Before creation, God appointed His Son to be the savior of the world. The hope of eternal life was given by God, “who cannot lie, promised before time began” (Titus 1:2). That promise was proclaimed to Adam and Eve after they had sinned. God promised to send a Savior who would crush Satan’s head. The other promises and prophecies in the Old Testament about the Messiah revealed more details about what God had already determined to do. Throughout the past three millennia, God has preserved His revealed and written Word through the work of careful copyists so that we can be certain that the Bible we now have is what God caused to be written. We can also be certain that we can trust the promises in the Bible since God has preserved them for us to read and believe.

**Salvation won:** The gracious providence of God determined that “when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Galatians 4:4-5). The inspired St. Paul here declares that God so guided human history that every one of His Messianic promises were fulfilled. In this case, the fullness of time meant that God allowed the Roman armies to conquer all the nations that surrounded the Mediterranean Sea. The fullness of time also required that the Roman Senate enact the first census of the new Roman Empire “that all the world should be registered” (Luke 2:1). God provided that the Messiah be born in Bethlehem just as He promised, for Joseph “was of the house and lineage of David” (Luke 2:4). In the fullness

of time, God also provided the method of execution which the Romans borrowed from the Greeks—crucifixion. God also gave peace to the Roman Empire so that the Gospel could be proclaimed to many people.

Of the Father's love begotten  
Ere the worlds began to be,  
He is Alpha and Omega,  
He the Source, the Ending He,  
Of the things that are, that have been,  
And that future years shall see  
Evermore and evermore. (ELH #181:1, TLH #98:1)

Neither Mary nor Joseph fully realized how Jesus' birth would change their lives. Though God worked many miracles surrounding Christ's birth, everything seemed to happen so naturally. Joseph and Mary did not realize that they would have to flee to Egypt for a time. Yet, God provided for their needs through the visit of the Magi when they offered Jesus gifts of "gold, frankincense, and myrrh" (Matthew 2:11). God protected the holy family when He told Joseph in a dream to flee Bethlehem and travel to Egypt.

By protecting Jesus from Herod's wrath, God fulfilled another prophesy, "Out of Egypt I called My Son" (Hosea 11:1). God certainly could have protected the children whom Herod's soldiers did kill. It is the mystery of His will that some are protected and others suffer. Nevertheless, those children of Bethlehem, who were brought to faith in God's covenant through the rite of circumcision, God also took into heaven. Though God allowed Herod to carry out his evil plan, Herod could never have interfered with God's plan to save the world through Jesus.

The entire three-year ministry of Jesus teaches much about God's providence. Jesus graciously provided wine for a wedding at Cana when they had run out. When the villagers of Nain were burying a young boy, Jesus came and with a word restored the boy alive to his widowed mother, thus providing for her care. Jesus calmed more than one storm on the Sea of Galilee to save the disciples from death. The disciples marveled that "even the wind and the sea obey Him" (Mark 4:41). Jesus mercifully healed all the sick that were brought to Him. Jesus fed 5,000 people from five loaves and two fish, and fed 4,000 from seven loaves of bread. Jesus' miracles all demonstrate that He is God who has power to change nature, power to stop every sickness and affliction, power over demons, and power over death itself.

Jesus' death on the cross was the greatest act of God's providence. "For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself... having made peace through the blood of His cross" (Colossians 1:19-20). In his Pentecost sermon Peter declared, "Him [Jesus], being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it." (Acts 2:23). This passage teaches two truths which cannot be logically united. On the one hand, everything happened as God willed it. Though the Jewish Council sought to put Jesus to death, but "not during the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people" (Mark 14:2), yet God determined that Jesus be crucified on the very day of Passover. Indeed, Jesus was nailed to the cross as God's sacrificial Lamb at the time of the morning sacrifice in the Temple and He died while the evening Temple sacrifice was performed.

On the other hand, the humans who were involved in Jesus' crucifixion cannot lay the blame on God. Judas, Caiaphas, Herod, and Pilate each bear the responsibility for their sins in crucifying Jesus by their "lawless hands." God did not force them to do evil. In fact, Jesus warned Judas many times, and even Pilate's wife warned him, "Have nothing to do with that just man" (Matthew 27:19). Instead God used their evil for the eternal good of the whole world by sending Jesus to the cross to pay the punishment for the sins of all the people.

Both God's providential will and man's moral responsibility for sin are true. People may oppose God and suffer eternal punishment for it, but they may never be able to frustrate or change God's blessed will.

Salvation is provided because of God's mercy and goodness. St. Paul wrote, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). On account of sin, our flesh could not keep God's law perfectly. God sent Jesus in the likeness of sinful flesh so that Jesus could fulfill the righteous requirements of the law by His perfect obedience and His innocent death. God raised Jesus from death to declare all sin was forgiven and to give life to all who believe on His name. Paul Gerhardt taught us to sing:

My Shepherd, now receive me;  
My Guardian, own me Thine.  
Great blessings Thou didst give me,  
O Source of gifts divine.  
Thy lips have often fed me  
With words of truth and love;  
Thy Spirit oft hath led me  
To heavenly joys above. (ELH #334:5, TLH #172:5).

**Salvation Given:** While Jesus has accomplished justification for every person on earth, God had to provide a means by which sinners might possess the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. For "the natural mind does not receive the things of the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:14). On Pentecost, God sent His Holy Spirit in order to call sinners to repentance and to faith in Jesus as their Savior from sin, as Jesus promised. We confess our need for the Holy Spirit in the explanation to the Third Article: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith" (*ELS Small Catechism*, p. 12).

The Holy Spirit's work is further explained in the *Formula of Concord*:

"To some extent reason and free will are able to lead an outwardly virtuous life. But to be born anew, to receive inwardly a new heart, mind, and spirit, is solely the work of the Holy Spirit. He opens the intellect and the heart to understand the Scriptures and to heed the Word, as we read in Luke 24:45, "Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures." Likewise, "Lydia heard us; the Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul" (Acts 16:14). "For God is at work in you, both to will and to work" (Phil. 2:13). God "gives the repentance" (Acts 5:51; II Tim. 2:25). He works faith, for "It has been granted to you by God that you should believe on him" (Phil. 1:29). "It is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent" (John 6:29). God gives an understanding heart, seeing eyes, and hearing ears (Deut. 29:4; Matt. 13:15). The Holy Spirit is a Spirit "of regeneration and renewal" (Titus 3:5,6). God removes the hard, stony heart and bestows a new and tender heart of flesh that we may walk in his commandments (Ezek. 11:19; 36:26; Deut. 30:6; Ps. 51:12); creates

us in Christ Jesus for good works (Eph. 2:10); and makes us new creatures (II Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15). In short, every good gift comes from God (James 1:17). No one can come to Christ unless the Father draws him (John 6:44). “No one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matt. 11:27). “No one can say, Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit” (I Cor. 12:3). “Apart from me,” says Christ, “you can do nothing” (John 15:5). “All our sufficiency is from God” (II Cor. 3:6). “What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?” (I Cor. 4:7). (*Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article II, Free Will: 26-27, Tappert, pp. 526-527*).

Left to ourselves, we shall but stray;  
Oh, lead us on the narrow way,  
    With wisest counsel guide us,  
And give us steadfastness that we  
May ever faithful prove to Thee  
    Whatever woes betide us.  
Come, Friend And mend Hearts now broken,  
Give a token Thou art near us,  
    Whom we trust to light and cheer us.

O Mighty Rock, O Source of Life;  
Let Thy dear Word, 'mid doubt and strife,  
    Be strong within us burning  
That we be faithful unto death,  
In Thy pure love and holy faith,  
    From Thee true wisdom learning.  
Thy grace And peace On us shower  
By Thy power Christ confessing,  
Let us win our Savior's blessing.  
    (ELH #27:4,6; TLH #235:4, 6).

**Salvation by grace:** God's provision for our salvation began before creation, “because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:13). God provided His grace so that those whom He chose in eternity would believe in time on earth, as Paul states: “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified” (Romans 8:29-30). Since we cannot know the mind of God in respect to His election to grace, we are bound to the evidence of God's calling us by the Gospel, His causing us to approach Him, and His working in our lives.

We therefore thank God for sending us the Holy Spirit and giving us faith in Jesus. For God gave people “the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born...of God” (John 1:12-13). Jesus emphasizes this truth, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:37, 44). Dr. Luther comments, “We could never come to recognize the Father's favor and grace were it not for the Lord Jesus, who is a mirror of the Father's heart. Apart from him we see nothing but an angry and terrible judge. But neither could we know anything of Christ, had it not been revealed by the Holy Spirit.” (Tappert, page 419, *Large Catechism, Part Two: Third Article:65*).

**Providence and Christ's Church:** As Lord of the Church, Jesus centers His providence on its members, those whom God called to faith. Throughout their life, just as God bountifully provides for bodily needs, He also pours out His bountiful grace in rich blessings on their souls. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17). All glory, honor, and thanks go to God for making them His children: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). In answer to the disciples' question "Who then can be saved?," Jesus replied, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26). The *Formula of Concord* re-emphasizes the good grace of God, quoting Dr. Martin Luther:

And while God in his righteous and severe judgment cast away forever the wicked spirits who fell, he has nevertheless willed, out of particular and pure grace, that our poor, fallen, and corrupted human nature should again become and be capable of life, both by its own natural and efficient aptitude, capacity, or capability—our human nature is in recalcitrant enmity against God—but out of pure grace through the gracious and efficacious working of the Holy Spirit. (*Formula of Concord*, Solid Declaration, Article II, Free Will: 22, Tappert, p. 525).

According to His good will, the Father draws people to Jesus through His Means of Grace—the Word and Sacraments. The Ephesians became believers in Christ "after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13). Faith is a gift of God's gracious providence: "Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures" (James 1:18). How the Spirit does this is hidden, as Luther wrote:

We should not and cannot pass judgment on the Holy Spirit's presence, operations, and gifts merely on the basis of our feeling, how and when we perceive it in our hearts. On the contrary, because the Holy Spirit's activity often is hidden, and happens under cover of great weakness, we should be certain, because of and on the basis of his promise, that the Word which is heard and preached is an office and work of the Holy Spirit, whereby he assuredly is potent and active in our hearts (II Cor. 2:14ff). (*Formula of Concord*, Solid Declaration, Article II, Free Will:56, Tappert, page 532).

Many of us received God's grace through infant Baptism. "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:26-27). In Christ, "Baptism effects forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, just as the words and promises of God declare" (*Small Catechism*).

Luther summarizes the Apostles' Creed with this thought, "In these three articles God himself has revealed and opened to us the most profound depths of his fatherly heart, his sheer, unutterable love. Moreover, having bestowed upon us everything in heaven and on earth, he has given us his Son and his Holy Spirit, through whom he brings us to himself" (Tappert, p. 419, *Large Catechism*, Part Two: Third Article:64).

By God's wise provision, Jesus has given the public ministry of the Word and Sacraments to dispense His gifts on His behalf to His Church and the world. The Ephesian elders were instructed by St. Paul: "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with

His own blood” (Acts 20:28). God provides such overseers and shepherds who use God’s Means of Grace through which the Holy Spirit creates faith, as St. Paul teaches: “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:14,15a,17).

Recently, Missionary Terry Schultz saw the truth of this passage. Thirty or more years ago, missionaries had come to a remote village in the upper Amazon. Many believed on Jesus, but that faith died without God’s Word and Sacraments to sustain it. This year, Basha, a tribal village chief leading seventy souls pleaded with Missionary Schultz to proclaim the Gospel to his people because as a lad he had seen how the gospel changed his grandfather’s life. It took two long days traveling through enemy territory, encountering near-death disasters, and a night-time visit by a jaguar, before he could proclaim the Gospel to these people, who received it with joy. By God’s grace, they understood the words of Isaiah: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!” (Isaiah 52:7, Romans 10:15b).

This incident manifests God’s blessed providence: He opened doors to hear the Word, He protected people from harm, He brought people to faith through His powerful Word. God has also blessed our synod with Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary to provide men to proclaim the Gospel. Ask the people of Peru who live in mountain villages or along the Amazon River how they felt when they heard the Gospel. Ask the people of Santiago, Chile what it means to hear that God’s salvation is free. Ask the people of Ukraine, Latvia, the Czech Republic, and all our Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference brothers and sisters in the faith how the Gospel brought joy to their lives because God sent someone to proclaim it to them.

God has been showing His grace to sinners throughout the centuries. In turn, believers have raised up memorials to thank God for His providence and grace.

### **Thus Far the Lord has Helped Me**

#### *God’s Providence at Work*

All history is His story--the story of God’s providence. Secular historians study people, events, and the conditions under which they lived to describe their causes and effects on the story of man. They use economic, social, political, and military history to explain the reason why events happen as they do. However, Christian historians will include God’s general care for the world and His specific care of individuals, whose care influences and greatly affects the history of the world.

Throughout all history, God has guided events according to His will. The Bible presents many instances of God’s intervention. Through the Flood and the dispersion from Babel, God dramatically changed the history of the world. No longer were humans united by language and culture. God used hailstorms and floods to defeat enemies. Surveying God’s acts, Samuel declared to the people, “Thus far the Lord has helped us.” This thought was captured in a familiar hymn:

The Lord hath helped me hitherto  
By His surpassing favor;  
His mercies ev'ry morn were new,  
His kindness did not waver.  
God hitherto hath been my Guide,  
Hath pleasures hitherto supplied,  
And hitherto hath helped me.

I praise and thank Thee, Lord, my God,  
For Thine abundant blessing  
Which heretofore Thou hast bestowed  
And I am still possessing.  
Inscribe this on my memory:  
The Lord hath done great things for me  
And graciously hath helped me.  
(ELH #71:1-2, TLH #33:1-2)

### ***A. Man's Memorials to God's Providence***

When believers have encountered and witnessed God's providential acts, they often raised memorials or monuments both to praise and thank God for His goodness and to remind future generations of the great things God had done.

**Noah's memorial of thanksgiving:** Imagine how Noah felt on the day God told him to leave the ark. During the year in the ark God had prevented a thousand dangers—injury, attacks by animals, starvation, the waves, storms, and earthquakes. Though they had a thousand things to prepare in order to live on the earth again, the very first thing Noah did was worship God. “Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar” (Genesis 8:20). Worship, thanks, and praise were Noah's top priority. This offering from a grateful heart pleased God, who gave His own “memorial” to remember the Flood: “I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth...the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh” (Genesis 9:13, 15).

**The Israelite's memorial at the Jordan River:** After forty years living in the wilderness, the Children of Israel joyfully packed their tents to cross over the Jordan River into the Promised Land. For God had told Moses, “I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:8). Joshua wanted future generations to know how God provided a way for the people to cross the Jordan. He commanded that twelve men, one from each tribe, take a stone from the dry river bed at the place where the priests stood in the Jordan and build a memorial “that this may be a sign among you when your children ask in time to come, saying, ‘What do these stones mean to you?’ Then you shall answer them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord; when it crossed over the Jordan” (Joshua 4:6,7).

**Samuel's memorial to God's help:** About three hundred years later, the prophet and judge Samuel called the Israelites together at Mizpah to fast in repentance. The Philistines sent their armies to break up this gathering. God sent thunder and lightning and confused the soldiers and the Israelites pursued them and killed many. "Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen, and called its name Ebenezer, saying, 'Thus far the Lord has helped us'" (1 Samuel 7:12). This memorial stone reminded the people that God continued to help them in spite of the many times they had turned from God. This memorial looked back on all of God's blessings.

**The Temple Memorial:** King Solomon built the Temple as a memorial which pointed worshipers to seek God's blessings in the future. At the dedication of this splendid building, Solomon prayed that God would bless those who would worship Him there: "Hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and act, and give to everyone according to his ways (for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men). Solomon reminded the Israelites of God's past deeds, "Blessed be the Lord, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He has promised. There has not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised through His servant Moses. May the Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers" (1 Kings 8:39, 56-57).

We, like Isaiah, can establish a memorial in our hearts and tell the next generations about what God has done: "I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord has bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which He has bestowed on them according to His mercies, according to the multitude of His lovingkindnesses" (Isaiah 63:7).

Praise to the Lord! Oh, let all that is in me adore Him!  
All that hath life and breath, come now with praises before Him!  
Let the Amen  
Sound from His people again;  
Gladly for aye we adore Him. (ELH #65:5, TLH #39:5)

Praise to Thee, O Master Builder,  
Maker of the earth and skies;  
Praise to Thee, in whom Thy temple  
Fitly framed together, lies;  
Praise to Thee, eternal Spirit,  
Binding all that lives in one  
Till our earthly praise be ended  
And th' eternal song begun! (TLH #632:6)

### ***B. God's Providence in the History of Christ's Church***

God's lovingkindness towards believers did not cease with Jesus' ascension into heaven. Without God's providence the Christian Church could not have grown. Sometimes God allowed "evil" to befall believers in order to do good. After Pentecost, God gave peace to the band of apostles and believers as they continued "steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). In order to "push" them from Jerusalem to bring the Gospel to "all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8), God allowed the Sanhedrin to stone Stephen to death and Saul to start a persecution of Christians in

Jerusalem. God turned this affliction into good for the Church when “those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word” while the apostles remained in Jerusalem (Acts 8:4).

During the next three hundred years, many a believer in Christ may have wondered how a loving God could allow such terrible persecutions to come upon His children. Jesus had warned His disciples that “If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 15:20; 16:33). Persecutions occurred in individual cities and throughout the whole Roman Empire. Instead of destroying the church, these persecutions made it grow even more as pagans wanted to have the same certain assurance of eternal life in Jesus that they witnessed in those who died. Thus “the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church.” Speaking of these persecutions, Peter wrote, “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you...but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:12-13).

In 313 A.D. the Emperor Constantine decreed that the Christian religion was no longer to be banned in the Empire and Christians had peace for a time. On August 24, 410, invaders from the north captured Rome. The pagans blamed the Christians for this. Christians themselves wondered why God allowed these afflictions. St. Augustine defended the providence of God in his book *The City of God*: “Although faith may imperfectly understand a given event, all events finally bear witness to the paradoxical work of God in the world” (“Providence in Christian Thought,” Richard Baepler, *The Caring God*, p. 50)

**The Reformation:** One might also ask why God allowed the early reformers to suffer death, such as Savonarola in Florence, Italy; Johann Hus in Bohemia (the Czech Republic), and the followers of Wycliff in England. Only God’s merciful protection kept Martin Luther from suffering a similar death. For under the ban of the Holy Roman Emperor anyone could have arrested Luther and brought him before Charles V to be killed. God provided protection in the person of the Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony and his son so that Luther was not harmed. God kept the enemies of the Gospel busy as they plotted against each other (Pope Leo X, Charles V, and Francis I the king of France) and as they worried about the Turkish armies invading Europe to the very gates of Vienna.

To the people who lived during the Reformation, all these events seemed quite natural. Yet in hindsight we can see God’s gracious, providential hand at work as He raised up Martin Luther to restore the preaching of the pure Gospel, as He protected those who confessed the Scripture truths at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, and as He caused the word to spread throughout Europe by means of the printed word. Thus, the “Lord has helped” His people.

**America:** Near the time of Luther’s birth, God also guided Columbus to open up a new world to exploration. It was not by chance that Columbus landed on Dominica in 1493. Had they sailed north, Columbus would have missed the tradewinds and to the south were dangerous reefs.

In the spring of 1607, Captain Newport sailed into Chesapeake Bay and landed forty miles up the James River. Only ten percent of the colonists survived that first year. And the Indian chief Powhatan may have been the only chief on the continent who would have put up with John Smith’s hostility and shared his corn with the colonists. By 1610, sixty starving

settlers where preparing to leave when Lord De Warr arrived with a large ship and supplies to save their lives.

When the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock in 1620, they did not realize that they came to the only plot of land they could have settled on. Four years before they landed, a mysterious plague killed every member of the Patuxets except Squanto, who helped the Pilgrims. The land that the Pilgrims settled belonged to no one. Because Squanto spoke English, the pilgrims were able to conclude a treaty with Massasoit, one chief who welcomed the Europeans as friends. (“Christian Evidences”, Richard M. Riss, 1966, jennib4@inlink.com).

During the closing months of 1838, five ships sailed from Bremerhaven bound for New Orleans in America. On these ships were German Lutherans who wanted to leave the persecution of their king for the religious freedom of America. The last ship, which C. F. W. Walther was originally scheduled to board, was lost at sea. By God’s grace, the people lost at sea did not have to endure the hardships of starting a new life in Missouri. Also by God’s grace, C. F. W. Walther was aboard another ship. For in him God had provided a spiritual leader which these German Lutherans needed so that the truths of Scripture could be clearly confessed in America as they once had been in Germany (*A Century of Grace*, Walter Baepler, pp. 27-28).

**God Helps our Synod:** Indeed, the Norwegian Lutherans found a kindred spirit in Dr. Walther. In 1857, the Norwegian Synod sent Pastors J. A. Ottesen and N. Brandt to find a seminary where their young men could be trained. They reported that the German Lutherans at the seminary in St. Louis “were all of the same spirit...and showed a heartfelt love of the Symbols as well as the teachings of the fathers, a heartfelt trust in God that His holy Word is correctly set forth therein” (quoted in “Jacob Aal Ottesen” by Prof. P. Lauritz Larsen, translated by Rev. G.A.R. Gullixson).

In the early 1900s, Satan tempted Norwegian Lutherans with the desire for a false unionism without agreeing to the truth. By God’s grace, thirteen pastors and the delegates from small congregations met eighty-five years ago at Lime Creek Lutheran Church on June 14, 1918 to begin a new confessional church body. They had no idea how the Lord might bless their work. That was not their concern at the moment. For they met to testify to the eternal truth that sinners are saved by faith in Christ alone and faith is created by the work of the Holy Spirit alone and not by man’s efforts or will. At one of the services, a Missouri Synod pastor, the Rev. H. Steger, preached on the parable of the mustard seed which grows into a tree with many branches and offers shelter to many birds. From the small beginnings in 1918, God has blessed the endeavors of those faithful men who confessed the truth so that the Evangelical Lutheran Synod’s branches have spread into many states of the union and into several countries of the world. (*A City Set on A Hill*, Theodore A. Aaberg, 1968, p. 75-80).

Within ten years, God made it possible for this fledgling synod of 5,000 members to purchase a college. In 1925, the synod received an offer to purchase the school, a hope “that faded into regrets when we took a more practical survey of the financial responsibilities and our present limited resources.” Even when the school was offered at \$90,000, it seemed as if they might be tempting God to accept it. Yet, God moved seventy-four people to support an association which would purchase the college. Then in 1927 at the synod convention at Lime Creek Lutheran Church, the synod delegates resolved, after much debate, to “take over the school.” (*A City Set on A Hill*, Theodore A. Aaberg, 1968, p. 96-102).

Little did those faithful pastors and delegates know that within two years the stock market would crash and the depression would last for a decade. Yet God knew. He provided a total of over \$25,000 to come from the National Lutheran Education Association, which paid most of the remaining debt that the synod owed on the college. In 1942, the synod carried an operating debt of over \$37,000. This meant that many professors did not receive pay every month. Nevertheless, with God's help the school continued to operate under the able administration of its president, Dr. S. C. Ylvisaker. (*A City Set on A Hill*, Theodore A. Aaberg, 1968, p. 102-103).

The present Bethany Lutheran College, with its many new buildings and its growing four-year degree program, is truly a monument to God's gracious providence. More importantly, God provided people on the faculty, staff, and Regents who were dedicated to the primary goal of teaching students the "one thing needful." Without God's grace, all those efforts would have been in vain. For during these past seventy-five years many other colleges, once supported by religious bodies, in reality have become secular schools.

Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary took a longer time to begin operation. Just when the synod was ready to start a seminary in 1943, the Selective Service Administration rules would not exempt its students from the draft. When the seminary finally did open its doors on September 24, 1946, God also provided as students a number of young men who had returned from military service. Over the last fifty-six years, God has provided faithful men who prepared for service in the public ministry of the ELS. These men have become leaders in the synod's efforts to carry out the Great Commission.

By God's providence, the synod decided to establish a mission in Lima, Peru among the poverty-stricken people living in the outer *barriadas* of that city. These people were "sheep without a shepherd." God blessed the decision to work among the poor of Lima in a way perhaps unintended by the original missionaries. For the poor also returned to their mountain villages and brought the gospel back to their relatives and friends. The Peruvian men who studied at the seminary in Lima were able to return to their village homes to shepherd the flocks God had provided.

We watch with amazement at how God directed our mission efforts into the Amazon river basin. People who hardly heard about Christ are thirsting to hear God's Word. Missionary Schultz just happened to visit a certain village several miles in from the river. When Francisco, the chief, did not appear at one service, he inquired about the reason. His daughter, Milga, was very sick with fever. The missionary offered to get her to the hospital, a three-hour trip by motor boat. Along the way the girl was so sick that the missionary baptized her. When the missionary visited the village a month later, the Milga warmly greeted them, the village people were more friendly, and twenty-two people were baptized. God used a sickness and caused the missionary to visit, all so that the gospel could be proclaimed. In that village, the people asked to start a school, which was opened this year! We give God the praise for opening these doors to people whom God has chosen for salvation through belief in the truth!

God provided the impetus to begin a new mission when persecution from Peruvian communists threatened. Ten years ago, our synod started another mission in Santiago, Chile when missionary James Olsen and his wife Mary moved there. By God's grace, the communist guerrillas' power has waned, and God has provided a second outpost for opportunities to proclaim the Gospel. God has indeed blessed the mission work in Santiago.

God also created opportunities to reach people in communist Ukraine with radio messages proclaiming the Gospel. When the Soviet Union dissolved, Thoughts of Faith was able

to begin mission work in Ukraine and the Czech Republic. Congregations, schools, seminaries, and medical missions have all sprung up as a result of that early work. Even the terrible nuclear reactor accident gave Thoughts of Faith opportunities to bring medical help to those who suffered from radiation sickness, and to bring the comforting message about Jesus to hurting souls. In addition, our synod has aided churches in Latvia and Australia.

A few years ago, God caused a Pentecostal Korean minister to look more closely at Scripture. He studied at our seminary and upon graduation started a mission to the Koreans in Irvine, California. By God's grace, another Korean pastor in Washington desires to preach the pure message of the gospel. Perhaps God may be opening other opportunities for our synod to work in Korea, or even in China!

When we look back on such history, we should recognize God's handiwork as He provided open doors to the faithful preaching of God's Word. This year we celebrate the 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the synod, the 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Lutheran Sentinel*, the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the synod purchasing Bethany Lutheran College, the fifty-sixth year of operating Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, the thirty-fourth year of mission work in Peru, and the tenth anniversary of the start of our mission work in Chile. We can truly see that God is merciful and gracious. He has blessed us with the truth and guided us to be a blessing to others.

Samuel invited the Israelites to look back through history by saying, "Thus far the Lord has helped us." He wanted the Israelites to continue to trust in God's care and salvation. About two hundred years later and a few miles away from that monument, Solomon's Temple was built near the mountain Moriah, the place where Abraham told Isaac, "The Lord will provide." Ebenezer and Moriah represent the story of God's providence—God has helped us; He will provide.

Our God, our Help in ages past,  
Our Hope for years to come,  
Our shelter from the stormy blast,  
and our eternal Home!

Under the shadow of Thy throne  
Thy saints have dwelt secure;  
Sufficient is Thine arm alone,  
And our defense is sure.  
(ELH #160:1,2; TLH #123:1,2)

### **Trust God for His Grace**

Because we live between Ebenezer (Thus far the Lord has helped us) and Moriah (The Lord will provide), as God's children we trust that God will keep all His promises to help us-- both during good times and in time of need. God does not allow evil to happen to His children, that is, He protects them from every evil that would destroy faith. Even though afflictions may occur, God's children are to trust in His care, as the hymn states:

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His grace;  
Behind a frowning providence,  
He hides a smiling face.  
(ELH # 434:2b, TLH 514:4)

**Trust His promises:** Amid all of his trials, Job trusted in the promise that his Redeemer lived and that Job would see Him on the Last Day (Job 19). When God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, the son of promise, Abraham trusted that God would raise Isaac from the dead because of God's promise about the Messiah. Joseph believed God's promises through the dreams he received that his brothers would one day bow down to him. Neither slavery nor prison broke him of that trust. Though David was branded as a rebel, hounded by soldiers, and was tempted to kill King Saul, David trusted that God would make him king of Israel just as He promised.

All these heroes of faith trusted God's promises even when it seemed as if they could never be fulfilled. Many other believers, including many Old Testament prophets suffered horrible deaths because of their proclaiming the truth. Nevertheless, Scripture says, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them" (Hebrews 11:13). New Testament apostles saw the fulfillment of God's promised Messiah. They too experienced God's protection—and suffered gruesome deaths. For they trusted God's promise that because Jesus lived, also they would live in heaven.

God has given many promises to the afflicted: "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10). "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20b). "Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you" (John 16:23). "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28). Cast "all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). You are "kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it be tried by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:5-7). "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

God does not promise that His children will never experience suffering, trials, or persecution. Indeed, Jesus declared that believers should expect tribulations as they pass through the valley of the shadow of death. God does promise that: "when you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you" (Isaiah 43:2). A hymn based on this verse says in part:

In every condition, in sickness and health  
In poverty's vale, or abounding in wealth  
At home and abroad, on the land, on the sea,—  
The Lord, the Almighty, thy strength e'er shall be.

"Fear not, I am with thee, oh, be not dismayed;  
For I am thy God and will still give thee aid;  
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,  
Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand."  
(ELH #521:2; TLH #427:2-3).

No matter what happens in the world, believers are not to be afraid even amid the worst afflictions, for Jesus promised, “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Through Isaiah God said, “Even to your old age, I am He, and even to gray hairs I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you” (Isaiah 46:4). We can trust this promise because of who God is almighty Creator and ever-present Helper, as the Psalmist says: “My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep” (Psalm 121:2-4).

Since God has given believers such blessed promises, God wants them to trust in His good providence during any trial. God’s children do not need astrology and fortune telling to “know” the future, or witchcraft to bend it to their good. For they trust that “all things work together for good to those who love God” (Romans 8:28). Paul reminds God’s children, “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Roman 8:32). And if God does good even to the wicked, will He not also provide His children with every blessing?

**Providence and Prayer:** Some people might conclude that because God knows everything that will happen and directs it according to His will and because God gives good things to all people, there is no need to pray to God. The whole Bible proclaims that prayer does make a difference. King Hezekiah prayed for a longer life to accomplish spiritual reforms among his people. God granted him fifteen more years of life. The apostle James noted the importance of prayer, “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit” (James 5:17-18). The believers in Jerusalem prayed that Peter’s life would be spared and God sent an angel to set him free.

Prayer is an act of worship as we honor our Creator and Redeemer. It is also an act of trust in God’s providence. The one who prays trusts that God will hear it because He has promised to answer: “Whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you” (John 16:23). God’s promises are open-ended. No restrictions are placed on our asking: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Luke 11:9). Again, “Before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear” (Isaiah 65:24). We cannot ask too much from God. However, the apostle James gives two reasons why people may not receive something from the Lord. First, “Let not that man [who doubts] suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord” (James 1:7). Second, “You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures” (James 4:3).

God desires that believers cast all their cares upon the One who cares for them. Jesus said that if one had faith the size of a mustard seed, one could move mountains. And the Bible declares, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16b). Prayer is important because both the believer and the world need God’s help. Thus we sing:

With the Lord begin thy task, Jesus will direct it;  
For His aid and counsel ask, Jesus will perfect it.  
Ev’ry morn with Jesus rise, And when day is ended,  
In His arms then close thine eyes; Be to Him commended.

Let each day begin with prayer, Praise and adoration;  
On the Lord cast every care, He is thy Salvation.  
Morning, evening, and at night Jesus will be near thee,  
Save thee from the Tempter's might, With His presence cheer thee.  
(ELH #82:1-2, TLH 540:1-2)

### **Trust God Even When Evil Happens**

Christians do not have to live too long in this world before they realize that evil may bring a great problem to their faith. When diagnosed with an incurable disease, their first reaction might be “What did we do to deserve this?” When natural disasters or plagues affect their lives, they may wonder, “Does God still care about us?” When persecution for the true faith arises, the devil might tempt them to ask, “Is our faith worth the afflictions we have to endure for it?” Under such circumstances, it might be hard to sing:

What God ordains is always good;  
His will abideth holy.  
As He directs my life for me,  
I follow meek and lowly.  
My God indeed In every need  
Doth well know how to shield me;  
To Him, then, I will yield me.  
(ELH #519:1, TLH #521:1)

**God gives only good things:** As a follow-up to His discussion about prayer, Jesus said, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” (Matthew 7:11). The best good gifts of God are the Holy Spirit, His true Word, baptism, absolution, and the Lord’s Supper through which we obtain the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. Through these gifts God will never lie to us, mislead us, or disappoint us. The apostle James referred to these gifts when he wrote, “Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth...” (James 1:17).

God knows all about the evils, afflictions, calamities, plagues, and disasters that happen in the world. God said, “I am the Lord, and there is no other; I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the Lord, do all these things” (Isaiah 45:6-7). God allows these things to happen, though He is not the author of sin and evil. However, we do not always see these afflictions as “good.”

Consider the Israelite girl who was captured and sent to Naaman’s household. Were her parents and others she loved killed? We do not know. Yet God intended that good happen to her and to her master, Naaman the leper! Trust God’s wisdom and providence, since He says, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

**God sets limits:** Though God may allow calamities to occur, He sets limits to the evil they do. In the case of Job, God at first told Satan, “All that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person” (Job 1:12). The second time God said, “Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life” (Job 2:6). God did not explain to Job why he had to endure such afflictions. Job was simply to trust that God meant them for good and believe that God protected him from the evil of rejecting God.

Several times in the Bible God makes it clear that people are not to question what God allows in life: “Woe to him who strives with his Maker! Shall the clay say to him who forms it, ‘What are you making?’” (Isaiah 45:9). It is hard not to complain when a teacher and family are killed in an automobile accident, when a believer suffers ill health and pain for fourteen long years, when a young pastor dies of cancer, when a young Christian lies helpless in a nursing home with spina bifida, or when parents must care for a greatly disabled child. When disease makes one helpless or death cuts short a promising life, it is hard for God’s children to trust that God is doing good. What people may forget is that they deserve much worse from God on account of their sins. They may not realize how God has limited their suffering. They may have temporarily lost sight of the eternal glories God is giving them in Jesus.

This past century witnessed great calamities through war and human butchery resulting from false political ideologies which made the state more important than God. While God permitted Adolph Hitler to rise to power and start the world on the way to war, Hitler’s stated goal of conquering the world fell far short. Similarly, God permitted Stalin to have power, in part, to stop Hitler. Stalin misused that power to cause the destruction of millions more people than Hitler destroyed. Stalin also fully supported the goal of establishing communism in every nation. Those dreams also lie in the dust as God’s providence prevented both a possible nuclear war and communist domination. These and many other examples show the truth of the Psalmist’s words, “The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect.” (Psalm 33:10). Job adds, “He frustrates the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot carry out their plans.” (Job 5:12).

When Ahithophel advised rebellious Absalom to attack David, God countered his advice and stopped the rebellion (2 Samuel 17:14). When Balak, king of Moab paid the prophet Balaam to curse Israel, God turned the curse into a blessing (Deuteronomy 23:5). Trust God to stop everything that would hinder God’s grace.

**Using evil for good:** At times God may allow evil to happen to grant believers spiritual blessings. One notable example is to be found from the life of King Manasseh, the son of the faithful king Hezekiah. During his long reign Menasseh led his people to do more evil than the northern kingdom of Israel. “Therefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze fetters, and carried him off to Babylon.” Manasseh learned God’s lesson. “Now when he [Manasseh] was in affliction, he implored the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed to Him; and He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God” (1 Chronicles 33:11-13).

Though Jesus was surrounded by enemies and nailed to the cross, He trusted God’s goodness even when it meant that He suffer God’s forsaking Him on the cross. So “when He

suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously” (1 Peter 2:23). By His death, he gave the world the greatest good—forgiveness of all sins, life, and salvation.

Peter concluded his discussion on persecution, “Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator” (1 Peter 4:19). That is, trust God even when afflictions come. Peter reminds us to trust in God’s promise of heavenly glory: “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:12-13).

Human wisdom would think that being in prison would not spread the gospel. But Paul reports the opposite. “I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ.” (Philippians 1:12-13). During his lifetime, C. F. W. Walther experienced two periods of physical affliction. He used his lengthy recovery time to read Scripture and the works of Martin Luther. And God used him to lead the German immigrants in the United States into God’s Word.

**Chastening:** God uses suffering and trials to bless our faith. The Bible declares, “Whom the Lord loves He chastens” (Hebrew 12:6). Just as human fathers chasten their children, even so God instructs and builds our faith through trials and sorrows. Therefore “shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?” (Hebrews 12:9). Whatever affliction, trial, or sorrow God allows may be difficult to bear. “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrew 12:11). The prophet Jonah needed God’s chastening. He wanted to witness God’s destruction of Ninevah. In order that Jonah might be trained to show mercy, God first caused a shade plant to grow and then “God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered” (Jonah 3:7). God explained that if Jonah had pity on the plant, why should not God have pity on the people of Ninevah? Through St. Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” God trained him in humility.

Jesus trained His disciples to trust in God’s care when He sent them out to preach. He command that they take only their clothes but no money. When they returned, Jesus asked them, “When I sent you without money bag, knapsack, and sandals, did you lack anything?” They said, “Nothing.” (Luke 22:35). Therefore God’s Word promises us, “Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain You; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved” (Psalm 55:22).

**Producing greater fruits of faith:** God knows that afflictions produce greater fruits of faith. “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” (John 15:2). God may take away some of our possessions so that we trust more in His gift of heaven. If our busy schedule leaves little time for God, He could slow us down through injury or disease so that we have the time. Jesus describes the fruits God desires to see in His children: “If My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire,” “abide in My love,” “keep My commandments” and “love one another as I have loved

you” (John 15:7-12). Though God does use afflictions to train His children and to produce more fruit, we are not to assume that God is chastising us with every trouble He sends.

**Tests by God?:** God’s children certainly need to pray “Lead us not into temptation,” for here we ask that “God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our own flesh may not deceive us nor lead us into misbelieve, despair, and other shameful sin and vice: and though we be thus tempted, that we may still in the end overcome and retain the victory.” (*Small Catechism*). Though God tempts no one to sin, yet the Bible says “God tempted Abraham” (Genesis 22:1). Our *Explanation to the Small Catechism* states that such temptations are “really trials or tests from Him; He in his grace employs these to purify His children and to strengthen their faith.” In the case where God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, when the test was finished God said, “Now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me” (Genesis 22:12). God then repeated the promise that, “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 22:18). Faith in that promise sustained Abraham during the remaining sixty-plus years left to him.

Whenever we deal with affliction and persecution, keep in mind the promise of Jesus: “Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last” (Revelation 22:12-13). His reward is the gift of eternal life to everyone who believes on Jesus as the Savior from sin. Therefore St. Paul wrote, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

### **Now Thank We All Our God**

#### *Our Response to God’s providence*

As he contemplated God’s providence, the Psalmist asks an important question: “What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?” His answer is, “I shall take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord now in the presence of all His people” (Psalm 116:12-14). Worship, trust, gifts and praise are just part of our response of faith to God’s good providence. Therefore we sing:

Now thank we all our God With heart and hands and voices,  
Who wondrous things hath done, In whom His world rejoices;  
Who from our mother’s arms Hath blessed us on our way  
With countless gifts of love And still is ours today

Oh, may this bounteous God Thro’ all our life be near us,  
With ever joyful hearts And blessed peace to cheer us  
And keep us in His grace And guide us when perplexed  
And free us from all ills In this world and the next. (ELH #63:1-2, TLH #36:1-2)

**Worship:** When David escaped from the soldiers of King Saul, he wrote: “I will freely sacrifice to You; I will praise Your name, O Lord, for it is good. For He has delivered me out of all trouble” (Psalm 54:6-7). David worshiped God because He is good and His mercy endures forever.

In the *Large Catechism*, Luther wrote, “Many a terrible and shocking calamity would befall us if God did not preserve us through our calling upon His name.” Luther commends the

custom of “children who cross themselves when they see or hear anything monstrous or fearful and exclaim, ‘Lord God, save us!’ ‘Help, dear Lord Christ!’ etc. Thus too, if anyone meets with unexpected good fortune, however trivial, he may say, ‘God be praised and thanked!’” (Tappert, p. 374, *Large Catechism*, Second Commandment I:72, 74).

When we consider all that God has done in our lives, we have special reason to thank and worship God. We worship God when we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” For the *Small Catechism* explains, “God certainly gives daily bread without our prayer, even to all the wicked; but we pray in this petition that He would lead us to acknowledge this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.” We are to worship and acknowledge of God’s providence every day of our lives, not just on Thanksgiving Day and New Years Day. Luther explains:

Thus, you see, God wishes to show us how he cares for us in all our needs and faithfully provides for our daily existence. Although he gives and provides these blessings bountifully, even for wicked men and rogues, yet he wishes us to pray for them so that we may realize that we have received them from his hand and may recognize in them his fatherly goodness toward us. When he withdraws his hand, nothing can prosper or last for any length of time, as indeed we see and experience every day (Tappert, p. 431, *Large Catechism*, Part Three: 4<sup>th</sup> Petition: 82-83).

**Trust:** Trust springs from faith in God’s promises to help. Trust in God means that believers acknowledge God’s past blessings, believe in His promises, and expect God to help in the future no matter what befalls them. Trust is the center point in the journey between Ebenezer (hitherto has the Lord helped us) and Moriah (the Lord will provide). Trust relies on God to give all things, as Luther noted under the First Commandment: “A god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need. To have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe him with our whole heart. In other words: ‘Whatever good thing you lack, look to me for it and seek it from me, and whenever you suffer misfortune and distress, come and cling to me. I am the one who will satisfy you and help you out of every need. Only let your heart cling to no one else.’” (Tappert, p. 366, *Large Catechism*, Part One, First Commandment: 2, 4).

As a response to God’s blessings, trusting God may seem to be easier when we experience what obviously appears to be God’s goodness. Greater faith is required when we deal with affliction and distress. Daniel trusted that God’s law was more important than the commands of King Nebuchadnezzar. Rather than defile himself by eating the king’s food, he requested to eat vegetables and water. Not only did God give him a healthy countenance; in addition, “God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams” (Daniel 1:17). When the king’s law commanded him not to pray to God, Daniel trusted that God would take care of him even though he would be thrown into the lion’s den.

**Stewardship:** Christian stewardship is an act of worship in which believers honor and thank God by giving back to Him a portion of His providence and trust in His promise to provide even more blessings. St. Paul bases Christian stewardship on the work of Jesus: “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). The Corinthians’ gifts came

from a heart of faith, as Paul said, “They first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God” (2 Corinthians 8:5).

After Pentecost, the response to the Gospel was to provide for the needy members of the congregation. God’s grace moved them to share, as Luke reports: “[They] all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need” (Acts 2:45-46). Barnabas sold land and gave the money to the apostles to distribute to the poor.

Such gifts to the Lord imply a trust that God would take care of their needs. To encourage our stewardship response to God’s gifts, Paul wrote, “ “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written, ‘He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever.’ Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of righteousness” (2 Corinthians 9:8-10).

The more we realize God’s blessings in our lives, the needs of the church, and the souls which are being brought to Christ, the more we will want to devote our time to prayer, our abilities to service for the Lord, and our possessions to the support of the work of the gospel.

**Praise:** God’s children feel the need to praise and thank God when they contemplate all that He has done for them. When David considered all the mercy God showed to his ancestors who left Egypt, he said, “Blessed be the Lord, who daily loads us with benefits, the God of our salvation!” (Psalm 68:19). Praise is due to God because “the Lord will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them. The Lord preserves all who love Him” (Psalm 145:19-20).

When St. Paul considered the glory of God’s salvation in Christ, His gracious grafting of the Gentiles into His kingdom, and His mercy toward all people, he declared: “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (Romans 11:33,34).

Many familiar hymns praise God for His providence and mercy. An Old Testament hymn declared, “Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts. All Your works shall praise you, O Lord, and Your saints shall bless You” (Psalm 145:2-4,10).

Our hymnbooks contain hundreds of hymns which praise God for His blessings, as this one does:

Praise to God, immortal praise, For the love that crowns our days;  
Bounteous Source of ev’ry joy, Let Thy praise our tongues employ.  
All to Thee, our God, we owe, Source whence all our blessings flow.

All the plenty summer pours; Autumn’s rich, o’erflowing stores;  
Flocks to whiten all the plain; Yellow sheaves of ripened grain-  
Lord, for these our souls shall raise Grateful vows and solemn praise.

Peace, prosperity , and health, Private bliss, and public wealth,  
Knowledge with its gladd'ning streams, True religion's holier beams.  
Lord, for these our souls shall raise Grateful vows and solemn praise.  
(TLH 572:1-3)

### **Conclusion**

A Samaritan woman asked Jesus for living water so she did not have to carry it so far in her pitcher. Jesus gave her the water of eternal life. A lame man sat in the Temple courts begging for money. Peter and John brought him health, saying to him, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." This man entered the temple "walking, leaping and praising God" (Acts 3:6,8). A young girl was possessed by demons. By God's grace and power, St. Paul drove them away in the name of Jesus. For this deed he was put in prison along with Silas. Yet through an earthquake, God led the jailer and his family to know Jesus as their Savior. After reaching land safely from a shipwreck, Paul gathered sticks for a fire. A poisonous snake in the sticks bit Paul, but by God's grace Paul suffered no harm. God used this incident to bring others to faith in Jesus.

Through such accounts we view the stone of Ebenezer, "So far the Lord **has** helped us." God has done all things well to preserve our lives. He continues to keep all His promises and protect believers from evil. He has blessed us with His Word and Sacraments, a congregation, synod, Christian day schools, a college and seminary, and mission opportunities to proclaim His name in the earth at home and to other people in distant lands.

God's providence in the past, His promises for the future, and His lovingkindnesses prompt us to trust Him in the certain hope of Moriah that "the Lord will provide." May our desire be that of the Psalmist: "Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! For He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness" (Psalm 107:8-9).

Jude ended his brief letter with this song of praise to God: "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen" (Jude 24-25).

Therefore we sing:

What is the world to me! My Jesus is my Treasure,  
My Life, my Health, my Wealth, My Friend, my Love, my Pleasure,  
My Joy, my Crown, my All, My Bliss eternally,  
Once more, then, I declare: What is the world to me? (TLH #430:8).

Praise God from whom all blessing flow,  
Praise Him, all creatures here below,  
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host,  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen. (ELH #592, TLH #644).

**To God Alone the Glory!**