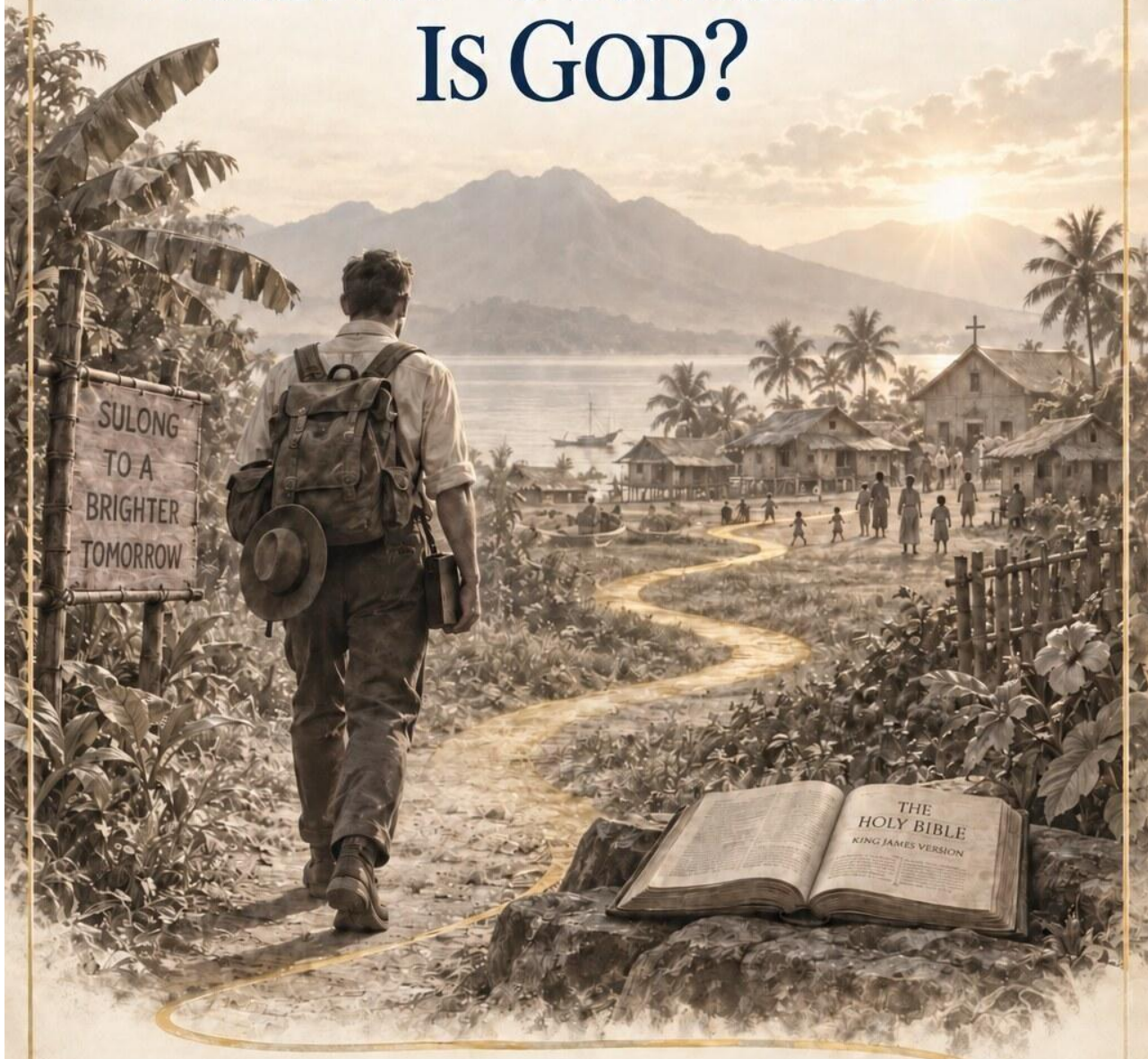


REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

HE SHALL DIRECT THY PATHS

A FOUR-PART SERIES | PART ONE OF FOUR

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN A “COINCIDENCE” IS GOD?



DR. THOMAS W. HAWKSLEY

PROVIDENCE • PROTECTION • SURRENDER • COVENANT

How Do You Know When a "Coincidence" Is God?

Sermon Transcript

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley Aloha.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let us Reason Together the Word of God.

If this is your first time with us, I want you to know that you are an honored guest.

You are welcome here whether you arrived with strong faith, difficult questions or no certainty about what you believe.

We are not frightened by honest questions because truth does not need to hide from examination.

If you would like us to stay in contact with you, our guest card asks for only your first name and email address.

We do not need your home address, telephone number or a complete history of your life. We simply want the opportunity to welcome you and let you know what is happening at Reason Together Church.

Our Keiki Kids Center is available for the children, and families are always welcome to keep their children with them if they prefer.

After the service, please join us at the Reason Together Cafe.

The coffee is free, and so are the refills on conversations.

COFFEE reminds us that Christ Offers Forgiveness For Everyone Everywhere.

Before we open today's question, let us ask God to guide both our reasoning and our response.

Let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father, thank You for bringing us together today.

Thank You for Your Word, which is true when our feelings are uncertain and steady when our circumstances are changing.

Teach us to trust You without pretending that we understand everything You are doing. Give us wisdom to recognize what You have clearly revealed and humility concerning what You have not.

Protect us from superstition, pride and the temptation to attach Your name to our own desires.

Help us see Jesus clearly, hear the Gospel faithfully and respond obediently.

In the name of Jesus we pray.

Amen.

Our Scripture reading comes from Proverbs 3:5-6.

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

"In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Keep those words before you.

They will provide the foundation for every part of this series.

Before we begin, I want to say a brief word about giving.

We do not pass an offering plate at Reason Together Church.

Our guests are never expected to give.

If you are a member of another church, I encourage you to support your home church faithfully.

For those who consider Reason Together Church their church home and feel led to give, there is a giving box in the back.

Second Corinthians 9:7 tells us, "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." Giving should be an act of trust, not pressure.

That provides an appropriate transition into our question today because trusting God is easy to discuss when we know where the path leads.

Trust becomes much more difficult when we can see only the next step.

As many of you know, I very rarely preach a series.

Normally, we take one question, open our Bibles, reason through that question together and then move on to something different.

There are exceptions.

We might devote ten individual studies to the Ten Commandments because each commandment deserves to be examined on its own, while all ten still belong together.

This series is another exception.

As Danielin and I approach our twentieth wedding anniversary, I have found myself becoming a little sentimental.

I have been thinking about where we started, how we met and how God brought us from there to where we are today.

But this series is intended to be much more than a walk down memory lane.

There are experiences in our story through which I believe God directed us, protected us, taught us and sometimes corrected us.

There are also difficult questions that personal experiences alone cannot answer.

Those questions must be brought to the Word of God.

That is why this is a four-part series.

In Part One, we will ask, "How Do You Know When a 'Coincidence' Is God?"

In Part Two, we will ask, "Could They Have Been Angels?"

In Part Three, we will ask, "Am I Seeking God's Will or God's Approval?"

Finally, in Part Four, we will ask, "Does God Choose Whom We Marry?"

The series is called "He Shall Direct Thy Paths." It

is based upon the verses we just read.

Over these four studies, I am going to tell you one continuing story.

It is the story of how I met Danielin.

But more importantly, we are going to place that story beside the Bible and ask what we can legitimately learn from it.

My experience will provide the questions.

The Bible must provide the authority for our answers.

Today we begin with providence.

Was it merely a coincidence that I read Proverbs 3:5-6 before sunrise and then heard the same passage again at a church I had never visited?

Was it a coincidence that I noticed one particular church worker among dozens of people? What does the Bible permit us to say when an unlikely series of events appears to form a recognizable path?

How do you know when a coincidence is God?

To answer that question, we need both a story and a standard.

The story will explain why we are asking.

Scripture will determine what we may conclude.

Let me take you back to my first visit to Cebu in the Philippines as a missionary.

I had almost three months to prepare, but I was uncertain about exactly what I was preparing to do.

Aside from crossing the border into Canada and taking an occasional cruise to the Bahamas, I had never left America.

International travel was unfamiliar to me.

The internet was not then what it is today, but I spent hours researching the places we planned to visit.

I was told that people in the large cities generally spoke English.

I was relieved to learn that there were familiar places such as McDonald's and Pizza Hut.

The provinces would be very different, but I was traveling with someone I trusted.

Pastor Herman "Buddy" Frankland had been my friend for most of my life.

He was the man who had led me to Christ decades earlier.

We would also be accompanied by local pastors who assured me that they would not allow me to become lost.

When we arrived at the airport in Cebu, I was pleasantly surprised.

The terminal looked like other airports I had visited.

We were met by people who knew Pastor Frankland.

An SUV waited for us at the curb.

The road from the airport showed us an older city, but the surroundings did not yet seem entirely foreign.

The hotel had the normal amenities I expected.

Across the street was a shopping plaza with several familiar restaurants.

The large church we visited that evening seated thousands of people.

There were differences, of course.

The building had open-air sections instead of windows, and there was no air conditioning.

The compassionate people placed a fan directly in front of the chair reserved for me.

The service included the old hymns and the kind of fire-and-brimstone preaching I had grown up hearing.

After a good night's sleep, I met Pastor Frankland near the pool for breakfast.

The buffet included Filipino, Australian and American foods.

My only complaint was the coffee, and those who know me understand that I am particular about my morning beverage.

At that point, the missionary journey almost felt like a vacation.

That feeling did not last.

On the night before the day at the center of this story, I could not sleep.

I had the unmistakable sense that something was about to happen.

It was not a frightening feeling.

I did not believe that disaster was approaching.

I simply felt that the next day would be significant.

I did not know why.

I did not receive an explanation.

I did not hear a voice giving me instructions.

I was simply awake and unusually aware that something felt different.

When the wake-up call came at five o'clock, I was already showered and reading my Bible.

The passage before me was Proverbs 3:5-6.

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

"In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." I

had to meet everyone for breakfast at five-thirty.

Before going downstairs, I stepped onto the balcony.

The sun was beginning to rise over Cebu.

I prayed.

I asked God to prepare me for whatever He wanted me to do that day.

Then I went downstairs for breakfast and coffee.

Our ride arrived exactly on schedule.

A brother and sister from an extension church drove us toward their province.

The beginning of the trip took us along a road that looked somewhat like an American interstate.

Then we turned onto a smaller street, and the view changed quickly.

I saw hundreds of tiny one-room structures with rusty metal roofs.

Children played near the road.

Some wore only a shirt.

Others had no clothing at all.

The driver explained that most of the people were squatters and many were unemployed.

He told me that the families with a roof were considered fortunate.

We were going to visit people who possessed even less.

When we reached the church, I discovered that the building was a welding shop during the week.

The owner allowed the congregation to use it during evenings and weekends.

There was no polished sanctuary.

There was no carefully controlled climate.

There were the sounds and smells of an industrial neighborhood surrounded by poverty.

It was unlike any church I had attended.

Yet nearly fifty church members had already arrived.

They were dressed well.

They were singing, arranging chairs, talking and preparing to serve.

I felt uncomfortable in the unfamiliar surroundings.

My plan was to greet a few people, find a seat in the back near a fan and quietly observe.

That was my plan.

Then someone brought out a banner with my name on it.

I was called to the front.

The pastor jokingly announced that I was a rich, single doctor from America and invited the single women to gather around.

I tried to listen as several people introduced themselves at the same time.

The pastor eventually settled everyone down and explained that he was simply helping the visitor feel like part of the congregation.

I smiled, spoke briefly and looked at my watch.

It would be hours before I returned to the safety of my hotel room.

After singing, the Bible study began.

We were asked to open our Bibles.

The passage was Proverbs 3:5-6.

It was the exact passage I had read before sunrise.

The feeling that something important was approaching became stronger.

Was that a coincidence?

Perhaps.

Proverbs 3:5-6 is not an obscure passage.

Christians read it often.

Pastors preach from it regularly.

If I had read John 3:16 that morning and heard John 3:16 later, no one would regard the repetition as statistically impossible.

The repetition of a familiar verse does not automatically turn it into a private message.

Yet it captured my attention.

It prepared me to watch the events of that day more closely.

That is the experience.

Now we must place it beside Scripture.

This brings us to the Biblical doctrine of providence.

Providence is not the idea that God remains far away until an emergency forces Him to intervene.

Providence is God's continuing care for His creation and His government of events toward His purposes.

It includes events that appear miraculous.

It also includes events that appear completely ordinary.

The Bible does not describe God as merely watching history unfold.

Proverbs 16:9 says, "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps." We make plans.

We choose routes.

We make responsible decisions.

At the same time, God remains sovereign over a world much larger than anything we can see.

Joseph provides one of Scripture's clearest examples.

His brothers hated him.

They sold him.

They deceived their father.

Joseph was carried into Egypt, falsely accused and imprisoned.

None of those experiences felt like favorable guidance while Joseph endured them.

Years later, Joseph could look backward and say in Genesis 50:20, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."

Notice that Joseph did not say his brothers' actions were good.

He said they intended evil.

God's providence does not transform evil motives into righteous motives.

It demonstrates that evil cannot overthrow God's purposes.

Joseph recognized providence retrospectively.

Looking backward, he could see connections that were invisible while he sat in the pit.

That is often how providence appears.

We live it going forward, one uncertain day at a time.

We begin to recognize it while looking backward.

Esther gives us another example.

She became queen before the danger to her people was fully revealed.

When the crisis came, Mordecai did not claim that he possessed exhaustive knowledge of everything God was doing.

He asked in Esther 4:14, "And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Who knoweth?

That is a wonderfully humble question.

Mordecai recognized the possibility of providence without claiming to know every hidden purpose of God.

His uncertainty did not become an excuse for inactivity.

Esther still had to choose courage.

She still had to act.

Providence did not eliminate responsibility.

First Samuel 9 tells us that Saul left home searching for his father's missing donkeys.

He did not know that his search would bring him to Samuel.

From Saul's perspective, he was handling a family problem.

From the reader's perspective, God was arranging a meeting.

A lost animal became part of a much larger story.

The book of Ruth uses an especially interesting word.

Ruth was a widow and a foreigner.

She needed food for herself and Naomi.

She made the practical decision to glean behind the reapers.

Ruth 2:3 says, "And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz." Her hap was to light on that field.

From Ruth's immediate perspective, she happened to enter it.

The reader knows that the field belongs to Boaz.

The reader knows that Boaz is connected to Naomi's family.

The reader will eventually see a marriage and a family line leading toward King David.

Ruth did not see that future while selecting a place to gather grain.

Was it chance from Ruth's perspective?

Was it providence from God's perspective?

Those are not necessarily competing descriptions.

An event may appear accidental to us while remaining fully visible to God.

The question is not whether God knows where every path leads.

The question is whether we know enough to interpret the path correctly.

After the prayer meeting in the welding-shop church, everyone shared bread rolls and coffee.

Then the congregation prepared to go door to door witnessing.

We crowded into two jeepneys.

A jeepney can be described as a small bus with bench seats facing each other.

I learned that a vehicle built for ten Americans could somehow accommodate thirty Filipinos.

People continued climbing inside until I wondered whether the vehicle could move.

I recognized most of the people from the church.

Sitting across from me was a young woman I had not noticed during the introductions.

I could not remember her name.

I finally admitted that I had forgotten it.

She explained that I had not forgotten because we had never met.

She had been working on a project in the back during the beginning of the service.

She introduced herself, but someone else immediately drew my attention away.

At that moment she was simply another church worker serving with the congregation. When we reached the community, what I saw from the vehicle did not prepare me for what I experienced after stepping onto the road.

The poverty was overwhelming.

The smell was difficult to describe.

Families survived by collecting recyclable material from burning dump sites and recovering discarded food.

Children and adults walked through mud and filth.

I looked down at the clothes I had been told to discard after the visit.

I realized that what I was wearing cost more than some families might earn in years.

My small travel-sized toiletries represented months of income.

The hotel room that I regarded as an ordinary travel expense represented an unimaginable luxury.

I did not know what to do with that realization.

The church members did.

They began going door to door.

They spoke with people.

They shared the Gospel.

They did not stand at the entrance analyzing poverty from a distance.

They entered the community and served.

I had arrived thinking I was one of the missionaries.

That morning, the local believers were teaching me what missionary faithfulness looked like.

The young church worker became separated from her group.

I did not know that at first.

I was listening as someone explained the area and watching people move along the road.

Then I looked up and saw her walking toward us.

For reasons I could not explain, I became convinced that she was in danger.

Nothing visible told me why.

I did not see a weapon.

I did not hear a threat.

I did not know the people around her.

My heart began racing.

I looked around to see whether anyone else noticed a problem.

No one appeared concerned.

I wanted to move toward her, but for a moment I felt unable to move.

I prayed four words.

"God please help her."

Before we continue that moment, we need to ask how Christians should evaluate events like these.

It is very easy to look back upon a happy conclusion and assign divine meaning to every detail.

It is also easy to dismiss everything we cannot measure as meaningless coincidence.

The Bible permits neither arrogance.

We should not remove God from His world.

We should not pretend that our interpretation of His world is equal to His Word.

There are several safeguards we need.

The first is Scripture.

God will not use a coincidence to guide us into disobedience to what He has clearly revealed.

No open door makes sin righteous.

No repeated verse excuses dishonesty.

No feeling of peace makes any form of sin holy.

No apparent sign authorizes cruelty, manipulation or pride.

If our interpretation contradicts Scripture, the interpretation is wrong.

The second safeguard is holiness.

First Thessalonians 4:3 says, "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification."

Before demanding hidden information about tomorrow, we should obey what God has revealed about today.

The third safeguard is wisdom.

James 1:5 tells us to ask God for wisdom.

Wisdom is not the same as receiving a secret answer to every question.

Wisdom is the ability to apply God's truth faithfully in complicated circumstances.

The fourth safeguard is counsel.

Proverbs 11:14 says, "Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety."

Other believers may notice dangers hidden by our enthusiasm.

They may also recognize opportunities hidden by our fear.

The fifth safeguard is humility.

There is a difference between saying, "I believe God may be directing me," and announcing,

"God told me, so no one may question my decision." The

first statement leaves room for examination.

The second can use God's name to protect our opinion from accountability.

The sixth safeguard is willingness to receive no.

If only one answer is acceptable, we are not truly asking for direction.

We are asking for approval.

That question will become central later in this series.

The seventh safeguard is fruit over time.

Some interpretations can be evaluated only after years have passed.

Fruit does not make every memory perfect or every decision beyond criticism.

But lasting faithfulness can help us evaluate what a moment eventually produced.

We also need to understand confirmation bias.

That term describes our tendency to notice information supporting what we already believe while overlooking information that challenges it.

If I want a decision to be correct, I can interpret every green traffic light as confirmation.

I can ignore every wise warning as negativity.

I can call a convenient opportunity an open door from God.

I can call an inconvenience an attack from Satan.

I can keep rearranging the evidence until God appears to agree with me.

That is not discernment.

It is placing religious language around my own desire.

An open door may be an opportunity.

It is not always an instruction to enter.

A closed door may be protection.

It may also be an obstacle requiring perseverance.

The circumstance alone does not explain itself.

In Acts 8, an angel directed Philip toward the road from Jerusalem to Gaza.

The Spirit told him to approach a particular chariot.

Inside was an Ethiopian reading Isaiah.

The encounter was providential, but Philip still had to ask a question, explain Scripture and proclaim Jesus.

Providence created the meeting.

Faithful obedience used the opportunity.

In Acts 10, Cornelius prayed in Caesarea while Peter was in Joppa.

God was preparing two people in different places for one meeting neither could yet understand.

Cornelius did not possess Peter's vision.

Peter did not initially understand Cornelius's need.

God saw the complete path while each person saw only a portion.

In Acts 16, Paul attempted to travel into certain regions and was prevented.

He continued moving until direction became clearer.

He did not interpret one closed route as the end of his calling.

He remained active, obedient and attentive.

Providence does not always mean standing still until every uncertainty disappears.

Sometimes we make the wisest faithful decision available and trust God with what we cannot know.

James 4 warns people who say, "To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain."

James does not condemn planning or business.

He condemns arrogant certainty about a future we do not control.

He says we ought to say, "If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." That is the posture of providence.

We plan responsibly.

We act faithfully.

We acknowledge that the future belongs to God.

Now return with me to that road in the Philippines.

The young church worker was still walking toward me.

I remained convinced that something was wrong.

I had prayed, "God please help her."

When I looked again, two unusually tall and powerful-looking men were walking beside her.

One was on her right.

One was on her left.

Each appeared to have a hand upon one of her shoulders.

I did not know who they were.

I did not know where they had come from.

I did not yet know what would happen when she reached me.

Before we leave that road, we must return to the strongest foundation of providence. Our confidence in God does not rest upon an unusual meeting, a repeated verse or a personal story with a happy conclusion.

Our confidence rests upon Jesus Christ.

Acts 2:23 says that Jesus was "delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," and yet He was taken and crucified by wicked hands.

Human beings acted sinfully.

God accomplished His redemptive purpose.

The cross appeared to Christ's followers like the destruction of every hope.

God was accomplishing salvation.

The resurrection revealed that the darkest event in history had not escaped the sovereign purpose of God.

If God could accomplish redemption through the cross, He can be trusted with the paths we do not understand.

Romans 8:28 does not say that every event feels good.

It says, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

The promise is not that we will recognize the good immediately.

The promise is that God remains at work.

Perhaps you are standing in a part of your life that looks nothing like the path you expected.

Perhaps a door closed.

Perhaps a relationship ended.

Perhaps a plan failed.

Perhaps something good appeared unexpectedly and you are afraid to trust it.

You do not need to invent an explanation.

You do not need to pretend that pain feels pleasant.

You do not need to call every event a sign.

You need to know the One who sees the entire path.

Proverbs does not say, "Understand the Lord with all thine heart."

It says, "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart." Understanding is valuable.

Trust becomes necessary when understanding reaches its limit.

Some people attempt to use providence as a substitute for a relationship with God.

They search for signs but do not seek Christ.

They want directions without surrender.

They want protection without repentance.

They want God to improve the path while they continue walking away from Him.

The Gospel offers something greater than favorable circumstances.

It offers forgiveness.

We have sinned against a holy God.

We cannot repair that separation through good intentions, religious activity or discovering a secret plan.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died upon the cross for our sins.

He was buried.

He rose again.

Salvation is offered by grace to everyone who repents and believes.

If you have never trusted Jesus Christ as Savior, you can come to Him today.

You do not need to wait for a coincidence.

You do not need an extraordinary experience.

The Gospel has already been clearly revealed.

The Bible says in Romans 10:9, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." If that expresses the desire of your heart, you may pray with me.

The words themselves do not save you.

Jesus saves.

Pray sincerely from your heart.

Dear God, I know that I am a sinner.

I know that I cannot save myself.

I believe that Jesus Christ died upon the cross for my sins.

I believe that He was buried and rose again.

I turn from my sin and place my faith in Jesus Christ.

Please forgive me.

Please save me.

Help me follow You from this day forward.

In the name of Jesus I pray.

Amen.

If you prayed that prayer sincerely, please speak with me or another trusted Christian before you leave.

We would be honored to pray with you and help you begin learning what it means to follow Christ.

For those who already know Jesus, our application is not to begin searching for strange patterns in everything that happens this week.

Our application is to trust God, obey Scripture and remain attentive without becoming superstitious.

Do not manufacture certainty.

Do not attach God's name to a decision simply because you want it badly.

Do not assume an ordinary day is unimportant.

Do not assume an interruption is outside the providence of God.

Make your plans.

Use wisdom.

Receive counsel.

Obey what God has already revealed.

Then trust Him with the part of the path you cannot see.

Today we have learned that God's providence is real, but our interpretation of providence is not infallible.

We may testify humbly about what we believe God has done without turning our experience into a promise that He must do the same thing for everyone else.

But the events of that morning were not finished.

I had prayed for the safety of a young church worker.

When I looked again, two extraordinarily large men were walking beside her.

A few moments later, she would be standing in front of me, but the men would be nowhere to be seen.

Were they angels?

That is where our next study must begin.

Next week, in Part Two of "He Shall Direct Thy Paths," we will return to that road and ask:

Could they have been angels?

Let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father, thank You that Your faithfulness does not depend upon our ability to understand every circumstance.

Teach us to trust You with the road ahead.

Give us wisdom for the decisions that belong to us and humility concerning the purposes that belong to You.

Help us acknowledge You in all our ways.

When we can see the path, keep us obedient.

When we cannot see the path, keep us faithful.

May everything in our lives point toward Jesus Christ.

In the name of Jesus we pray.

Amen.

As you leave today, do not spend the week trying to turn every ordinary event into a supernatural sign.

Acknowledge God in all your ways.

Obeys what He has already made clear.

Trust Him with what remains hidden.

Providence does not require us to understand the entire path.

It calls us to trust the One who directs it.

And next week, we will return to that road in the Philippines and consider whether those two men could have been angels.

Please join us at the Reason Together Cafe.

Bring your questions and stay for the conversation.

Aloha Nui Loa.

REASON TOGETHER CHURCH
HE SHALL DIRECT THY PATHS A
FOUR-PART SERIES | PART ONE OF FOUR

PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

**How Do You Know When a
"Coincidence" Is God?**

Providence

Proverbs 3:5-6

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Pastor & Teacher

www.ReasonTogether.Church

Bring your questions. Open your Bible.

Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Introduction

This four-part series began as Danielin and I approached our twentieth wedding anniversary. Looking backward made me sentimental, but sentiment alone would not justify four studies. The story raises questions many Christians face whenever an unexpected meeting, repeated passage of Scripture, inward impression or opened opportunity seems to carry unusual meaning.

Part One asks, 'How Do You Know When a "Coincidence" Is God?' Part Two asks, 'Could They Have Been Angels?' Part Three asks, 'Am I Seeking God's Will or God's Approval?' Part Four asks, 'Does God Choose Whom We Marry?' The questions form one movement. We begin with events around us, turn toward motives within us and finish with responsible choice before God.

The governing passage for the entire series is Proverbs 3:5-6: 'Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall

direct thy paths.' My experience supplies the questions, but it cannot supply authority. Scripture must decide what we may affirm, what we should test and what we must leave unresolved.

Controlling truth: God's providence is real and continuous, but our interpretation of one event is fallible. Christians may testify humbly, test impressions Biblically and trust God without manufacturing certainty.

1. The Story Behind the Question

An Unfamiliar Mission Field

My first visit to Cebu was also my first major journey outside the United States. Pastor Herman 'Buddy' Frankland, the man who had led me to Christ many years earlier, traveled with me. Local pastors and church members met us, transported us and guided us. The trip was unfamiliar, but it was not an impulsive solitary adventure.

The first impressions were reassuring. The airport appeared familiar. The hotel offered ordinary travel comforts. Restaurants I recognized stood across the street. A large church service sounded enough like the preaching of my childhood that the distance from home briefly seemed smaller. That sense of control changed when we traveled beyond the familiar surroundings and entered communities marked by severe poverty.

The Passage Before Sunrise

The night before the central day in the story, I could not sleep. I had a strong but nonfrightening sense that the next day would matter. I did not hear a voice. I was not given an explanation. By the time the five o'clock wake-up call came, I was already showered and reading Proverbs 3:5-6. I stepped onto the balcony, watched sunrise begin over Cebu and prayed that God would prepare me for whatever He wanted me to do.

This distinction matters. The experience was an impression, not a new verse of Scripture. Its intensity did not make it self-authenticating. It did make me attentive. An impression can properly prompt prayer, caution or examination without being treated as an infallible message.

The Same Passage Again

After breakfast we traveled to an extension church that used a welding shop during evenings and weekends. The surroundings were far removed from the hotel. Nearly fifty church members had gathered to sing, prepare chairs and serve their neighbors. When the Bible study began, the congregation opened to Proverbs 3:5-6, the exact passage I had read before sunrise.

Was that a coincidence? Proverbs 3:5-6 is not obscure. A familiar passage appearing twice in one morning is not mathematically impossible. Repetition alone does not turn a public Biblical text into a private prediction. Yet the repetition caught my attention and prepared me to watch the day carefully. That is a fair report of the experience. The larger interpretation still had to be tested.

Danielin Enters the Story

After the gathering, the church members prepared to witness door to door. We crowded into jeepneys and traveled toward a squatter community. A young church worker sat across from me. I thought I had forgotten her name, but she explained that we had not yet met because she had been working in the back. She introduced herself. At that moment Danielin was one faithful worker among many, not a romantic conclusion waiting to be announced.

Inside the community, poverty became personal rather than picturesque. The believers did not observe from a distance. They entered homes, spoke with families and shared the Gospel. Later I saw Danielin walking alone. I sensed that she might be in danger and prayed, 'God, please help her.' Two unusually large men appeared walking beside her. This first commentary stops at that scene. Their identity belongs to Part Two.

2. Proverbs 3:5-6 in Context

Wisdom for a Whole Life

Proverbs 3 does not offer a technique for decoding coincidences. It presents wisdom for a life lived under the fear of the LORD. The surrounding instruction speaks of mercy, truth, honoring God with substance, receiving correction and refusing envy toward violent people. The promised direction belongs inside covenantal trust and obedient wisdom, not inside a search for secret clues detached from character.

'Trust in the LORD with all thine heart' calls for an undivided reliance upon God's character. The heart in Biblical usage includes thought, desire and purpose. Trust is not the suspension of reason. It is the refusal to make one's limited reasoning the final court of appeal. The same book repeatedly commands knowledge, understanding, counsel and prudent foresight.

Do Not Lean on a Partial View

'Lean not unto thine own understanding' does not mean that every personal conclusion is wrong. It means our understanding cannot bear the full weight of ultimate trust. We see one moment, remember selectively and often do not know another person's motives. God knows the end from the beginning. Humility is therefore not intellectual laziness. It is accurate creaturely selfknowledge.

This verse challenges two opposite errors. Skepticism can lean on human understanding by ruling out providence before examining Scripture. Superstition can do the same by treating personal pattern recognition as certainty. Both place the interpreter at the center. Biblical trust allows God to govern while admitting that the believer may misunderstand what a particular event means.

Acknowledge Him in All Thy Ways

To acknowledge God in all our ways is more than mentioning Him after a decision has been made. It includes bringing motives, methods, relationships and consequences beneath His authority. A person has not acknowledged God by attaching spiritual language to conduct that contradicts His commands. No feeling of peace makes any form of sin holy.

The promise 'he shall direct thy paths' is assurance of God's faithful government, not a promise that every turn will be explained in advance. A directed path may include delay, correction, suffering or a door that remains closed. Joseph's path went through a pit and prison. Paul's route included prohibitions and redirection. Direction describes the faithfulness of the Guide, not the ease of the road.

3. What Christians Mean by Providence

Not an Absent Creator

Providence is God's continuing preservation, care and government of creation toward His wise purposes. God did not make the world, withdraw from it and wait for emergencies. Scripture describes Him as sustaining life, governing nations, feeding creatures and directing human steps.

Proverbs 16:9 says, 'A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps.' Human planning is real, yet it occurs inside God's larger rule.

The doctrine is broader than spectacular intervention. Rain, work, migration, ordinary conversation and the timing of travel can all belong to providence without becoming miracles. God ordinarily works through means. A physician's care, a friend's counsel, an airline schedule or a driver's decision remains an ordinary cause even when a believer gives thanks for God's care through it.

Coincidence From Our Viewpoint

The word coincidence can describe two events that converge meaningfully when the observer cannot demonstrate a causal link. Used this way, the word is not a denial of God. It names our limited viewpoint. Ruth 2:3 says that Ruth's 'hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto

Boaz.' From her immediate position, she came upon the field. From the narrative's wider position, the reader can see a providential story taking shape.

Chance and providence become rivals only when chance is treated as a power outside God's government. Ordinary speech does not have to carry that philosophical claim. A believer may say, 'I happened to meet her there,' while also believing that nothing escaped God's knowledge. The human statement describes access to causes. The theological statement describes God's sovereignty.

Ordinary and Extraordinary Providence

A miracle is not simply an event with excellent timing. Scripture's signs and wonders display extraordinary divine action and often carry an authoritative redemptive purpose. Providence also works through ordinary sequences. Calling every surprise miraculous weakens both categories. It encourages listeners to exaggerate testimony and makes ordinary divine care seem spiritually inferior.

The repeated passage in Cebu may be described as providential without claiming that the laws of nature were interrupted. The theological question is not whether something impossible occurred. It is whether God may govern ordinary timing and use it within a believer's life. Scripture answers yes. The interpretive question is whether we can always identify His precise intention. Scripture teaches greater caution.

Providence Does Not Make Evil Good

Joseph told his brothers, 'ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good' (Genesis 50:20). The same event contained wicked human intention and good divine purpose. God's government did not excuse betrayal. Providence is never permission to call abuse, deception or exploitation holy. Moral responsibility remains.

Acts 2:23 makes the same distinction at the cross. Jesus was delivered by God's determinate counsel and foreknowledge, yet lawless people crucified Him. The clearest providence in history did not erase guilt. This protects suffering people from shallow explanations. We may affirm that evil cannot overthrow God without pretending that we know why every wound was permitted.

4. Biblical Patterns of Providential Direction

Joseph: Recognition While Looking Backward

Joseph did not receive a running explanation for each betrayal, accusation and delay. Years passed before the preservation of many lives made the pattern visible. His testimony was

retrospective. He could name his brothers' intention as evil and God's purpose as good without claiming that prison felt good while he endured it.

Providence is often lived forward and recognized backward. This pattern invites patience. An unexplained interruption today may later become intelligible, or it may remain unexplained throughout this life. Faith does not require a complete timeline before obeying. It rests in the character revealed by God while refusing to invent an explanation He has not given.

Esther: Courage Without Exhaustive Knowledge

Mordecai asked Esther, 'who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?' (Esther 4:14). The question is powerful because it combines providential possibility with verbal humility. He did not claim exhaustive knowledge of God's secret purpose. He called Esther to responsible courage within the opportunity before her.

'Who knoweth?' is useful language for discernment. Uncertainty did not become inactivity. Esther fasted, counted the cost and approached the king. A person can acknowledge limited interpretation while still making a faithful decision. Humility does not mean that no conclusion may be reached. It means the conclusion does not borrow more authority than the evidence provides.

Saul's Donkeys and Ruth's Field

First Samuel 9 begins with missing donkeys. Saul leaves home to address a family problem and is brought into contact with Samuel. The reader sees more than Saul sees. A mundane errand becomes part of a national transition. The account does not teach Christians to look for prophetic meaning in every lost object. It shows that ordinary responsibilities can carry people into purposes they do not yet understand.

Ruth chooses to glean because she and Naomi need food. Her action is practical, lawful and responsible. The field happens to belong to Boaz. Providence does not replace initiative. Ruth works while God governs a story beyond her sight. This guards against passivity disguised as trust.

Acts: Converging Paths and Responsible Means

Acts 8 presents striking coordination. Philip is directed toward the Gaza road. An Ethiopian official is traveling while reading Isaiah. Philip approaches, asks whether the man understands and then preaches Jesus from the Scripture. Divine arrangement does not eliminate conversation, exegesis or a human response. The meeting serves the revealed Gospel.

Acts 10 prepares Cornelius and Peter separately. Acts 16 records closed routes before the Macedonian vision redirects Paul. Acts 27 joins divine promise to responsible means when Paul

insists that sailors remain aboard. These accounts differ in detail, so no single narrative should be converted into a universal technique. Together they show that providence, obedience and ordinary action are not enemies.

James: Planning With Open Hands

James 4:13-15 confronts people who announce where they will go, how long they will remain and what profit they will gain without reckoning with life's uncertainty. The correction is, 'If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.' The words are not a verbal charm. They describe a surrendered posture.

Christian planning is neither arrogance nor unbelief. The sin is planning as though our forecast governs tomorrow. We may compare options, purchase tickets and prepare budgets while confessing that the Lord remains free to redirect us. Providence produces responsible dependence rather than fatalism.

5. Can Circumstances Speak?

Evidence Is Not Authority

Circumstances provide real information. A visa expires. A physician gives a diagnosis. A job offer arrives. A trusted person notices a danger. Ignoring facts can be as foolish as worshipping them. Yet an event does not interpret itself. An open door establishes possibility, not moral duty. A closed door establishes difficulty, not necessarily divine prohibition.

The distinction between evidence and authority is essential. Circumstances may help us apply Scripture, but they cannot amend Scripture. If an opportunity requires dishonesty, sexual sin, cruelty or the neglect of a clear obligation, its profitability and timing do not make it God's command. Revealed truth judges the opportunity.

A Repeated Verse Is Still a Public Text

When a passage appears repeatedly during a decision, a believer may properly return to it, study its context and ask what obedience it requires. The danger begins when the verse is detached from its meaning and converted into a private code. Proverbs 3:5-6 called me to trust God. It did not contain Danielin's name or command a particular relationship.

A public promise may carry timely personal force without acquiring a new private meaning. The Spirit uses Scripture to correct, comfort and guide believers, but He does not need our misquotation to accomplish His work. The safer question is not, 'What hidden message can I make this verse say?' It is, 'What does this verse truly say, and how must I obey it here?'

An Impression May Prompt Examination

A strong inward sense can be significant to the person who experiences it. It can prompt prayer, alertness or a wise pause. It can also arise from fear, hope, memory, fatigue or incomplete information. Intensity is not the same as truth. The person who feels certain still needs Scripture, counsel and facts.

The sermon carefully reports that I sensed danger when I saw Danielin walking. That statement identifies my experience. It does not prove that an objective danger existed. I prayed because prayer was righteous under either interpretation. Asking God to help her did not require me to declare that I possessed secret knowledge.

Signs in Scripture

Biblical signs are not merely unusual events noticed by a hopeful observer. God authoritatively designates them and gives them a place in revelation. Gideon's fleece is often used as a general model, but Judges 6 presents a fearful man asking for repeated assurance after God has already spoken. The narrative records God's patience. It does not command Christians to create arbitrary tests.

Manufactured signs can become a way of assigning God our preferred answer: if the phone rings, if a particular color appears or if a verse opens at random, then God must mean yes. Such methods avoid mature judgment while sounding spiritual. God is free to use any circumstance. We are not free to force Him into a system He has not promised to honor.

6. When the Phrase "God Told Me" Becomes Dangerous

The Weight of Divine Authority

'God told me' is not merely a description of strong confidence. It places the authority of God behind the speaker's interpretation. Used carelessly, the phrase can end legitimate questions before they begin. A spouse, employee or church member may fear that disagreement means disobedience to God.

Scripture contains genuine divine speech. That fact should make believers more careful, not less. When our evidence is a circumstance, impression or personal application, our grammar should identify it honestly: 'I believe,' 'it appears,' 'I sensed' or 'I received this as providential.' Humble wording does not deny God. It refuses to confuse our interpretation with His infallibility.

Four Common Misuses

The phrase becomes especially harmful when it is used to excuse sin, pressure romance, demand money or shield leadership from examination. A married person cannot sanctify an affair by claiming divine guidance. A suitor cannot turn personal desire into God's command for another

person. A fundraiser cannot make private revelation a debt owed by the listener. A leader cannot silence accountability by declaring every plan untouchable.

In each case, the problem is more than inaccurate vocabulary. Divine authority is being used to control another conscience. God may guide individuals, but He does not contradict His written Word or remove another person's moral agency. Christian counsel should protect the vulnerable person who is being told that someone else's certainty must become his or her obedience.

Pastoral safeguard: Never use a private impression to require another person to sin, surrender consent, ignore facts or stop asking responsible questions.

Confidence That Can Be Examined

Responsible testimony permits examination. It can state the facts, name the inference and admit what remains unknown. 'I read the same passage twice that morning' is a reported fact. 'I believe God used the repetition to prepare my attention' is an interpretation. 'The verse required a particular outcome' would exceed what the text says.

This layered speech is not cold or faithless. It allows gratitude without exaggeration. It also protects testimony if a later detail is remembered differently or an expected result does not occur. Our confidence rests finally in God, not in the perfection of autobiographical memory.

Confidence level	Language that fits the evidence
Clearly taught	Scripture teaches this. We know this from the written Word.
Strongly supported	The best Biblical reading is this. The evidence strongly supports it.
Responsible testimony	I believe God directed this. I received the event as providential.
Permitted possibility	This may have been providential. It could have carried personal significance.
Unresolved	I do not know. Scripture does not tell us enough to claim certainty.

7. Confirmation Bias and Spiritual Discernment

A Human Vulnerability

Psychologists use confirmation bias to describe the tendency to seek, notice or interpret evidence in ways favorable to an existing belief or expectation. Motivated reasoning describes the related power of desire to influence how evidence is weighed. These concepts do not prove that a spiritual interpretation is false. They explain why sincere people still need safeguards.

A person who wants a job may remember every encouraging comment and minimize every warning. A person afraid to move may interpret every inconvenience as a closed door. A person longing for a relationship may connect unrelated details into a promise. A skeptic may notice every failed interpretation and ignore careful accounts of providential care. Bias does not belong to only one side.

Desire Is Not Disproof

Wanting an outcome does not make the outcome wrong. Danielin could be loved without the love itself disproving providence. A desired job may be wise. A feared diagnosis may still be true. The task is not to become desireless. It is to name desire honestly so that it does not masquerade as neutral evidence.

The most revealing question may be, 'What answer am I unwilling to receive?' If prayer is only a request for approval, contrary evidence will always be explained away. Surrender creates room for truth. Jesus' prayer, 'nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done' (Luke 22:42), does not eliminate desire. It places desire beneath the Father's will.

Memory and Meaning

Personal testimony is remembered meaningfully rather than mechanically. Details that later prove important become prominent. Other ordinary details recede. This is a normal feature of memory, not automatic dishonesty. It does mean that testimony should distinguish contemporaneous records, remembered facts and later theological interpretation.

The magazine account controls the autobiographical facts used in this commentary. Even so, the spiritual conclusion is stated proportionately. Long-term fruit can deepen gratitude for the path, but a happy outcome cannot retroactively turn every earlier feeling into revelation. Providence may be celebrated without making memory infallible.

8. Eight Safeguards for Discerning Providence

1. Begin With Scripture

Psalm 119:105 calls God's Word a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. Second Timothy 3:16-17 describes Scripture as sufficient to furnish the believer for every good work. Begin with what God has revealed. Ask what commands, prohibitions, promises and wisdom principles actually govern the decision.

A circumstance cannot authorize what Scripture forbids or cancel what Scripture commands. This is the first safeguard because every later consideration is fallible. Correct interpretation of Scripture still requires context, but the standard itself does not rise and fall with our mood.

2. Ask What Holiness Requires

First Thessalonians 4:3 says, 'For this is the will of God, even your sanctification.' Christians often seek hidden information while neglecting revealed holiness. Before asking where to live or whom to date, ask whether the method is truthful, pure, just and loving.

Holiness does not answer every prudential question. Two lawful options may remain. It does remove false options. When the route requires sin, the believer does not need another sign. God's moral will has already spoken.

3. Ask for Wisdom, Not Secret Data

James 1:5 invites the person who lacks wisdom to ask God. Wisdom is the God-given capacity to apply truth faithfully within real circumstances. It includes moral clarity, teachability, patience and practical judgment. It is not necessarily advance knowledge of every consequence.

Praying for wisdom changes the question. Instead of demanding a private prediction, we ask for the character and judgment needed to walk faithfully. God may answer through Scripture,

counsel, facts, restraint or courage. The result may be responsible action without emotional certainty.

4. Invite Wise Counsel

Proverbs teaches that purposes are established by counsel and that safety exists in a multitude of counselors. Choose people who can question both enthusiasm and fear. A useful counselor is not merely someone older or agreeable. The person should know Scripture, understand relevant facts and remain free from a stake in the preferred outcome.

Counsel does not transfer responsibility. Ten voices can still be wrong. Its value includes exposing assumptions we cannot see alone. If every questioning voice is dismissed as unspiritual, the interpretation has become resistant to truth.

5. Name Ordinary Explanations

Acknowledging ordinary causes does not exclude God. The church leader may have selected Proverbs 3 because it is a common teaching passage. Danielin was present because she served in that congregation. The men may have had an ordinary reason for walking the same road. Naming such explanations prevents embellishment.

Providence works through secondary causes. Therefore a natural explanation and a providential interpretation need not cancel one another. The important discipline is honesty. Do not suppress available facts merely to make the story sound miraculous.

6. Test Your Willingness to Receive No

A person is not fully seeking God's direction when only one answer will be accepted. Ask what obedience would require if the opportunity closes, the relationship ends or the desired confirmation never comes. This question often reveals whether prayer has become a demand for approval.

Receiving no does not mean every obstacle is final. Paul encountered opposition while obeying his calling. Some doors require perseverance. The safeguard concerns surrender: Can I continue to obey God if my preferred path is not granted? If not, the desire may already be ruling the discernment.

7. Allow Time and Examine Fruit

Jesus said that trees are known by their fruits. Galatians 5 identifies the Spirit's fruit as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. Over time, an interpretation should be examined by the kind of life it produces. Growing secrecy, pride, manipulation or recklessness is a warning.

Good fruit is not mathematical proof that every remembered impression was accurate. Unbelievers can make prudent decisions, and believers can learn through mistaken ones. Fruit is one part of discernment. Its strength is that time often exposes what immediate excitement conceals.

8. Obey the Light Already Given

Uncertainty about tomorrow does not suspend today's duties. Work honestly. Keep promises. Care for family. Tell the truth. Pray. Serve the neighbor in front of you. Ruth gleaned before she understood the larger story. Esther acted courageously without exhaustive knowledge.

Present obedience protects us from making guidance an excuse for delay. The lamp of Psalm 119 may illuminate the next step rather than the entire road. A believer can walk with limited interpretation because the Shepherd is not limited.

9. Applying the Safeguards to the Cebu Story

What May Be Stated Confidently

Scripture confidently teaches that God governs creation, directs human steps and can use ordinary events within His purposes. The first-person account confidently reports that I read Proverbs 3:5-6 before sunrise and heard it again at the church gathering. It also reports that the repetition made me attentive and that I later prayed when I sensed Danielin might be in danger.

These claims do not depend upon proving a statistical miracle. They preserve the difference between doctrine and testimony. The doctrine rests upon canonical Scripture. The autobiographical facts rest upon the published account. The interpretation is offered as a humble judgment.

What Should Be Said Humbly

I believe God used the repeated passage and the events of that day as part of His direction. That language is appropriate because it names faith without demanding that another Christian treat my interpretation as revelation. It remains open to examination and gives God glory without pretending to possess His complete explanation.

The better testimony is not, 'I can prove what every detail meant.' It is, 'I learned to trust the Lord while He directed a path I did not yet understand.' The second statement places the emphasis where Proverbs places it: upon the trustworthy God rather than the perceptive traveler.

What Part One Does Not Claim

Part One does not claim that reading the same verse twice obligated me to pursue Danielin. It does not claim that my inward sense proved an objective danger. It does not identify the two men. It does not use our later marriage as proof that every impression was correct. Those boundaries are not evasions. They are part of faithful reasoning.

The study also does not ask a skeptical reader to accept my interpretation as doctrine. It asks whether the Biblical account leaves room for God to govern ordinary timing and whether believers can recognize that care without abandoning humility. The answer to both questions is yes.

10. Witnesses Beyond the Canon

Canonical Authority Comes First

Historical and noncanonical writings can show how earlier Jewish and Christian communities spoke about providence. They may provide vocabulary or interpretive history. They cannot establish doctrine. The canonical books of Scripture govern every conclusion in this commentary.

This distinction is especially important in a series that will later discuss angels and marriage. An ancient story may be interesting and spiritually suggestive without becoming a rule for faith. Age does not create inspiration. Historical witnesses are servants of the investigation, not judges over the Bible.

Wisdom of Solomon and the Language of Providence

Wisdom of Solomon 14:3 speaks of a ship and says, 'But thy providence, O Father, governeth it.' The passage is useful because it joins human skill and divine care. A person constructs and guides the vessel, yet God's providence governs. The wording reflects a Jewish wisdom setting in which ordinary means were not separated from divine oversight.

The text is not used here as canonical proof. Proverbs, Genesis, Ruth, Esther, Acts and James already supply the Biblical foundation. Wisdom of Solomon serves as a historical witness to the vocabulary and helps demonstrate that providence need not mean passivity.

The 1689 Baptist Confession

Chapter 5 of the Second London Baptist Confession describes God as upholding, directing, arranging and governing all creatures and things through wise and holy providence. It also affirms that God ordinarily uses means while remaining free to work above, without and against them. This provides a careful historic Baptist summary of the Scriptural pattern.

The confession also refuses to make God the author or approver of sin. That balance matters. Providence is comprehensive, yet human evil remains evil. The confession does not replace exegesis, but it shows that the distinctions made in this study stand within a mature stream of Baptist theology.

Calvin on Events That Appear Fortuitous

John Calvin's Institutes, Book I, chapters 16-18, opposes the picture of an absentee Creator. He discusses events that appear fortuitous from the human position while remaining governed by God's counsel. His emphasis resembles the distinction drawn from Ruth: apparent happenstance describes our limited access to causes, not God's loss of control.

Calvin also wrestles with divine government and wicked action. Readers need not adopt every later theological formulation to appreciate the central caution. We should neither exile God from ordinary history nor accuse Him of the creature's evil intention.

Spurgeon and Daily Providence

Charles Spurgeon often preached providence through the texture of daily life. In a sermon titled 'Providence,' he connected the doctrine with the events of an ordinary week. In 'God's Nearness to Us,' he defended the practice of observing God's providences while refusing the idea that God is distant from daily affairs.

Spurgeon's confidence is pastorally invigorating, but testimony still benefits from the safeguards developed here. Seeing God's hand should produce worship and obedience, not unchallengeable speculation. The preacher's warmth and the interpreter's restraint belong together.

11. Providence and the Gospel

Do Not Wait for a Coincidence to Come to Christ

A seeker does not need a private sign before responding to the Gospel. God has publicly revealed His Son. Scripture declares that Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again. The call to repent and believe does not depend upon an unusual song, repeated number or accidental meeting.

Waiting for a sign can become a way of postponing revealed obedience. The Gospel is not hidden in circumstances. Jesus openly invites sinners to come. Providence may bring a person to a conversation, church service or Bible passage, but the saving authority rests in the revealed message about Christ.

The Cross Is the Clearest Providential Convergence

At the cross, political power, religious hostility, betrayal and human fear converged. Acts 4:27-28 says that Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and the people of Israel gathered to do what God's hand and counsel determined before to be done. Human actors remained responsible.

God's redemptive purpose prevailed.

The resurrection proves that providence is not vague optimism. The Father raised the crucified Son. Therefore Romans 8:28-29 can locate the believer's good within conformity to Christ, not immediate comfort. God may work through painful events without calling pain good or promising that we will understand quickly.

Trust the Shepherd More Than the Map

Christians sometimes want guidance to remove the need for trust. We want a complete map, a guaranteed outcome and an explanation for every interruption. Proverbs offers something better: a faithful Lord who directs paths while calling for wholehearted trust.

The safest center of a providence testimony is not, 'Look how accurately I decoded the clues.' It is, 'Look how faithfully God cared for me when I did not know what He was doing.' That testimony leaves room for wonder, repentance and correction. It also keeps Christ greater than the coincidence.

12. Where Part One Leaves Us

An Unfinished Scene

The first study ends on a road in a desperately poor community. Danielin is walking. I sense danger and pray. Two unusually large men appear beside her. The facts visible to me were real, but the identity and purpose of the men were not disclosed. The scene therefore embodies the central lesson of Part One: providence may be trusted even when interpretation remains incomplete.

It would be easy to rush ahead because later events make the story feel meaningful. Good storytelling and good theology require restraint. The next question deserves its own Biblical investigation. Part Two will ask, 'Could They Have Been Angels?' It will examine what Scripture teaches about angels, what it does not teach and how possibility differs from proof.

The Series Movement

The progression is deliberate. Part One establishes that God directs paths without making our reading infallible. Part Two examines an extraordinary possibility without pretending to settle an

unrecoverable historical detail. Part Three moves from outward events to inward surrender. Part Four considers providence, consent, wisdom and covenant in marriage.

Together the studies refuse two reductions. The story is more than memory lane, and it is less than a new revelation binding every listener. It is testimony brought beneath Scripture. That posture allows us to be grateful for what we believe God did while remaining honest about what only God fully knows.

Pastoral Summary

How do you know when a 'coincidence' is God? At one level, every event remains within God's providential government. At another level, we do not always know the specific purpose of an event or possess authority to announce our interpretation as divine speech. The doctrine is certain. The application to one remembered convergence may be humble testimony.

Proverbs 3:5-6 directs attention away from confidence in our own understanding and toward trust in the Lord. Joseph teaches retrospective recognition. Esther teaches courageous humility. Ruth joins ordinary responsibility to quiet providence. Acts joins divine direction to Scripture, conversation and practical means. James teaches plans held under the Lord's will.

Therefore test impressions by Scripture, holiness, wisdom, counsel, ordinary facts, surrender, time, fruit and present obedience. Refuse every use of 'God told me' that excuses sin or controls another conscience. Use language that matches the evidence. A humble 'I believe God directed me' can be a strong testimony because its strength rests in God rather than in the claim of personal infallibility.

Most importantly, do not make coincidence the center of faith. Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, is openly revealed. The believer can walk an unexplained road because the Shepherd has already demonstrated His love at the cross. We may not know what every turn means, but we know whom we have trusted.

A Discernment Worksheet

1. What does Scripture clearly command, forbid or permit in this decision?
2. Have I read the relevant passages in context rather than using a verse as a private code?
3. What do I want, and what answer am I least willing to receive?
4. Does this path require holiness, truthfulness, consent and responsible care for others?
5. What ordinary explanations or practical facts must be acknowledged?
6. Which mature counselors are free to question my assumptions?
7. Am I treating an open door as an option or as an unquestionable command?

8. What fruit is this interpretation producing over time?
9. What present duty can I obey even while the larger question remains unresolved?
10. What level of confidence does the available evidence actually warrant?

Questions for Reflection

1. When have I recognized God's care more clearly while looking backward than while living forward?
2. Do I tend to dismiss providence too quickly or assign divine meaning too confidently?
3. Have I ever used a repeated verse without first asking what it means in context?
4. What is the difference between an available opportunity and a divine command?
5. Can trusted believers challenge my interpretation without being treated as unspiritual?
6. What outcome am I presently asking God to approve rather than surrendering to His will?
7. How would my language change if I separated fact, inference and unresolved possibility?
8. Has someone used the phrase 'God told me' to pressure my conscience? What Biblical boundary is needed?
9. What revealed duty should I obey today instead of waiting for a sign?
10. How does the cross give firmer confidence than any private coincidence could provide?

A Prayer for Discernment

Our Heavenly Father, thank You for governing what we can see and what we cannot see. Teach us to trust You with all our hearts without pretending that our understanding is complete. Give us wisdom to read Your Word faithfully, courage to obey what You have revealed and humility about what remains hidden. Protect us from superstition, manipulation and the pride that attaches Your name to our preferences. Help us receive correction, wait patiently and walk in the light You have already given. Above all, keep our confidence fixed upon Jesus Christ, crucified and risen for us. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

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