



**METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH**

MINISTRY OF BIBLICAL STUDIES Handout

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**January 31, 2024**

**I know your  
deeds. See, I have  
placed before you  
an open door that  
no one can shut. I  
know that you  
have little  
strength, yet you  
have kept my  
word and have not  
denied my name.**

Revelation 3:8



# **Welcome to the Metropolitan Community Church**

## **Ministry of Biblical Study Classes**

January 31, 2024

### **“Walk in His Providence: Expect an Open Door to your Spiritual Growth”**

When the master in Jesus’s parable gave talents to his servants and went away, two got busy multiplying their master’s money, and one hid his talent in the dirt. Something similar can happen when people like us hear about the providence of God.

On the one hand, few doctrines have inflamed more holy ambition in the hearts of God’s people. When some hear that God rules over galaxies and governments, over winds and waves, and over every detail in our little lives (Ephesians 1:11), they get busy doing good.

Christians gripped by providence have built hospitals, ended slave trades, founded orphanages, launched reformations, and pierced the darkness of unreached peoples.

On the other hand, few doctrines have been used more often to excuse passivity, sloth, and the sovereignty of the status quo. When some hear that God reigns over all, they reach for the remote, kick up their feet, take sin a little less seriously, bury their talents six feet under. They may do good when the opportunity arises, when the schedule allows, but they will rarely search for good to do.

How could the all-pervasive providence of God energize some and paralyze others?

How could it cause some to blaze boldly into the unknown, and others to putter on the same tired paths, rarely dreaming, never risking?

## Waiting for an Open Door

When William Carey, the pioneering missionary to India, first proposed the idea of sending Christians to unreached places, an older pastor reportedly protested, "Sit down, young man, sit down and be still. When God wants to convert the heathen, he will do it without consulting either you or me."

Such an application of God's providence is simplistic, unbiblical, irresponsible — and yet also understandable. Though many of us would never make such a statement, we have our own ways of allowing providence to lull us into passivity. Consider the common language of waiting or praying for "an open door."

The phrase "open door" comes from the apostle Paul (Colossians 4:3–4), yet many of us use the phrase in ways the apostle didn't. Paul prayed for open doors, yes, but then he vigorously turned handles (compare 1 Corinthians 16:8–9 with Acts 19:1–10).

Many of us, on the other hand, sit in the hallway of life, waiting until a divine hand should swing a door open and push us through it.

Too often, by saying, "There was no open door," we mean that there was no obvious, divine orchestration of events that made our path unmistakable. "I didn't share the gospel because no one seemed interested." "I didn't have that hard conversation because we just never ran into each other." "I didn't confess that sin because there didn't seem to be a good time." Providence, if distorted, can excuse us from all manner of uncomfortable duties.

When William Carey gazed toward India, he did not see what we might call an open door: fifty million Muslims and Hindus living half a world and two oceans away. Hence the pastor's response. Yet Carey went anyway, believing that God, in his providence, could make a way where there seemed to be no way. And India is still bearing fruit from his faith.

## For Such a Time as This

Carey found his inspiration, of course, from dozens of men and women in Scripture who ventured forth into discomfort and danger by the power of God's providence.

Where did Jonathan find the courage to attack an army with only his armor-bearer at his side? Providence: "Come, . . . it may be that the Lord will work for us, for nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few" (1 Samuel 14:6).

How did Esther muster the courage to risk the king's fury? Providence: "Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14).

Why did David step toward Goliath with only a sling and five stones? Providence: "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine" (1 Samuel 17:37).

**"God has planned for some doors to open only as we push them."**

Some hear, "God reigns over all," and think, "Then what difference could my effort make?" Others, like Jonathan, Esther, and David, heard, "God reigns over all," and thought, "Then God can use even my effort, small though it is." And so, after thinking, weighing, and praying, they went forth — not always sure that God would prosper their plans, but deeply confident that, if he wanted to, no force in heaven or on earth could stop him.

In other words, they knew their God ruled in heaven. They saw a need on the earth. And with "Your kingdom come" burning through the chambers of their hearts (Matthew 6:10), they dreamed up something new for the sake of his name.

## Act the Providence of God

Perhaps, for some of us, the difficulty lies here: we expect to react to the providence of God, but not to act the providence of God. Some of us live as though providence were something only to react to. We wait for a clear, providential open door, and then we react to that providence by walking through the doorway. But as we've seen, God has planned for some doors to open only as we push them. He has planned for us to act his providence.

Paul gives us the clearest biblical expression of this dynamic in Philippians 2:12–13: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” Notice: Our work does not follow God’s work. Rather, our work is the simultaneous effect of God’s work. Or as John Piper writes, “What Paul makes plain here is how fully our own effort is called into action. We do not wait for the miracle; we act the miracle” (Providence, ).

Sometimes, to be sure, God is pleased to place some good work right in our lap. Perhaps someone really does ask about the hope that is in us, or the hard conversation we need to have opens easily and naturally. In moments like these, we do indeed react to God’s providence. But God can be just as active in us when our effort is fully involved: when we invite a neighbor over to study the Bible together, or when we arrange a time and place for the difficult talk.

We need not wait for something unmistakably divine, something unquestionably providential, before we work out our salvation in all kinds of obedience. Instead, we need only see some good work to do, entrust ourselves to God through earnest prayer, work hard in conscious dependence on him, and then, once finished, turn around and say with Paul, “It was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10). And thus we act the providence of God.

## Imagine Good

In his providence, God has prepared good works for us to walk in (Ephesians 2:10). But many of them will not come as we passively drift beneath God's providence. They will come to us, instead, as we strain our renewed minds, bend our born-again imaginations, and fashion possibilities in the factory of our new hearts — knowing that every good resolve is a spark of his providence.

**"You are who you are, what you are, where you are, because of the all-pervasive providence of God."**

So look around you. Nothing about your life is an accident. You are who you are, what you are, where you are, because of the all-pervasive providence of God. He has given you whatever talents you have, in his wisdom, for such a time as this — so that you would add a stroke to the canvas in front of you, chisel away at the statue you see, speak and act in the drama you're in, so that this world looks a little more like the work of art God is redeeming it to be.

There are neighbors to befriend, children to disciple, churches to plant, crisis-pregnancy centers to serve, and a thousand tasks at our jobs to do with excellence and love. And how will we know if God, in his providence, has opened a door for any of these opportunities? We will pray and turn the handle.

