

What Is This Book About? (please read this)

You may be hurting too much even to consider a book like this, but do you want help? Do you need someone to understand how far away God seems sometimes, and why He's so slow to get things done? If so, this book is for you.

I was in the infantry and survived the Tet Offensive in Vietnam while many of my friends did not survive, or were injured seriously. I patched up my fellow infantry men and had them rescued by helicopter and taken to safety. "You surely were *lucky*," a friend once said to me. I always cringe when someone uses the word "luck," for that presupposes a god of chaos. No, my survival in Vietnam was not due to my superior planning (there wasn't any!), or my alleged robust and dogged character (what is that?). I was preserved by God's gracious timing.

As I look back over my 67 years, I've had a major trial every decade of my life, and some in between, and it usually seemed that God's timing was terrible, until time had passed, and I looked back. Then things seemed very different, even gracious.

By "God," I mean the Triune God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, not the generic God that politicians often invoke when they say "*God* bless you" which sounds religious and allows their hearers to fill in the blank about "God's" identity.

There is no generic God but only the Triune God, Who providentially reigns over all creation. But what is "Providence"? This is the only time I'll use a technical word in this book, but providence is that

mysterious working of God in making all things turn out good, in the long run, for His people:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).

Carefully note that this verse does not say that everything is good, or that each isolated thing is good but that over time, "all things work *together* for good." "Together" includes other things. For example, a minor car wreck would be bad, but if we add that it kept us from being hit head on by an eighteen-wheeler, then it was good.

But what is "good"? That is defined as what God does to minister grace to us to make us conform to the moral image of His Son, Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29).

I cannot interpret God's providence with certainty, for it is a mystery, and I especially do not try to use past providence to predict the particulars of future providence. I can only look back with humility and be grateful to the One who loved me and gave Himself for me, and thus has guided my life by His mysterious sovereignty. I have studied God's sovereignty theoretically for decades, taught it in seminary, written about it, but this book is the practical side of that mystery. Indeed, He *makes* me live it, whether I want to or not! If I had my way, I would be a billionaire, famous, and have a dozen homes in various parts of the world. Instead, He has met my needs ("This day, my daily bread"), given me ministry as pastor in churches and as dean of a seminary, while providing me with a comfortable home. Moreover, I have a wonderful wife of 43 years and counting, two godly children, each of whom has a Christian spouse and two godly children. But the greatest gift I have is the Lord Jesus Christ. It is from Him that all other gifts flow, and with Him, I must be satisfied.

12 Why Is God Always Late?

Is this book about miracles? Does the Triune God do miracles today? Well, He is God, so what would we expect? Yet He rarely does the kind of miracle that we see Jesus doing when He healed someone instantly, perfectly, and with just the spoken word, though surely He can and probably does that on occasion. That being true, we cannot manipulate Him with our “faith” and demand that He spring from a bottle like a genie to grant us our wishes. Faith and prayer are designed to help us submit to God, not to control Him. One major assumption of this book, though rarely stated explicitly, is that we are not in charge of our lives—He is. Thus the timing of events is what **He** does, not what we do. Too often people in our churches today assume that worship is about them so they engage in entertainment, grand standing, thinking they can control God if they can conjure enough faith. We are His servants, not the reverse.

The “miracles” God does today, and has done in my life, are primarily “miracles” of timing, bringing people and circumstances together in such a way that trials suddenly evaporate, and if not suddenly, then over time work out in such an unusual manner that the only explanation is the providence of our sovereign Creator, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. My responsibility is to have patience and to use human means of grace to work things out.

Let us consider something about time, since this book is about God’s timing in my life. Whatever time is, it has been created by God. We as creatures will never be outside time; that is the Triune God’s domain, the realm of eternity, where time neither begins nor ends. For us it has a beginning but not an end. All the lives of all creatures on earth are governed by God’s created time. For example, the earth rotates to give us 24 hours. The moon orbits the earth to give us

months. The earth orbits the sun to give us years. The seven day week is revealed by God in Genesis one.

Time is also the past. As a tree without roots produces no fruit, a person without a past is barren, because he does not know who he is or where he is going. Without a past, we are just dandelions, blown about by the whims of a godless culture (Psalm 1:4; Eph. 4:14).

Moreover, in Galatians 4:4 we read:

When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law.

God subjected His Son to time, having planned just the right moment for Him to enter the world, which means that every detail of His life had meaning, which in turn implies every detail of our lives has meaning. Every moment of our lives has everlasting potential, for everything we do will either be confirmed or denied at the Last Day judgment. Moreover, we all have the same amount of time, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year. No one, no matter how rich or how powerful, can add another minute to this plan. But we can use His time wisely by living for Him or foolishly by storing up toys to leave to others. The choice is ours—and His—as you will see.

Finally, as the children of Israel were about to enter the Promised Land, having spent 40 years in the wilderness, here is what Moses said to them:

“And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you *and* test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man

14 Why Is God Always Late?

shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD" (Deut. 8:2-3).

In other words, life is not about being happy but about being holy, not about the collection of things but about maturity in one's walk with the Triune God.

Now let us take the adventure of seeing a charmed life, for I have lived with a sovereign wall around me (a hedge, as Satan said in Job 1:10), and nothing can happen without His will.