

A Case of Providence, Not Coincidence.

Esther 4:1-9

When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and he cried out with a loud and bitter cry. He went up to the entrance of the king's gate, for no one was allowed to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. And in every province, wherever the king's command and his decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and many of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.

When Esther's young women and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed. She sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what this was and why it was. Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate, and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her and command her to go to the king to beg his favor and plead with him on behalf of her people. And Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. – Esther 4:1-9 ESV

Chapter three ended with the words, “And the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was thrown into confusion.” As news spread of the king’s edict declaring an official day set aside for the slaughter of all Jews living in the kingdom of Persia, the reaction among the citizens of the kingdom was mixed. There was confusion among many. Others were probably excited about the prospect of being able to take the lives of the Jews and their property and possessions as well. But for the Jews, the news was shocking. They were in Persia because of the destruction of their own homeland, and now they were facing destruction once again. Where was their God? How could this be happening to them? And Mordecai, the uncle of Queen Esther, upon hearing the news, goes into a state of mourning. He tears his clothes, covers himself in sackcloth and ashes and proceeds to wander the streets of the capital city, offering a visible illustration to all who could see of just how devastating this news was to the Jews. And he was not alone. Jews all over the kingdom were reacting in the same way – “as news of the king’s decree reached all the provinces, there was great mourning among the Jews. They fasted, wept, and wailed, and many people lay in burlap and ashes” (Esther 4:3 NLT).

Mordecai’s trek through the city took him all the way to the gates of the palace, but he is refused entrance. The king’s sumptuous lifestyle and celebratory mood was not to be disrupted by some despondent and disheveled Hebrew. It is interesting to note the contrast between the opening of this book and the current state of Mordecai’s demeanor. The story began with a royal party, a festival that lasted more than 180 days and was marked by wine, food, fine linens and an overall mood of celebration. Now we have Mordecai and his fellow Jews fasting, mourning and covering themselves in soot and coarse

garments. The original party was a result of the king's command. His word produced a festive occasion and a non-stop celebration where the food and wine flowed non-stop for nearly six months. Now, by his decree, an entire population of people found themselves in deep and bitter mourning, because their lives had been declared worthless and their future, hopeless.

The news of Mordecai's presence outside the city gates was taken to Esther. She seems to have had no idea as to what was going on. In her isolated and insulated world within the palace, she had not yet heard about the decree. She offered Mordecai a change of clothes, but he refused. She sent a trusted confidant to Mordecai in order to ascertain the cause of his distress. What she would learn would rock her world. Her fairy tale-like rise from obscurity to wealth, power and royal prestige was about to come to an abrupt halt. Mordecai told her everything. He withheld none of the sordid details. She may have been safe in her cocoon of comfort and ease within the palace, but Mordecai wanted her to know just how dangerous her position really was. But he also wanted her to realize how vital and obviously God-ordained her newfound role was going to be. He told her of Haman's plan, even sending her a copy of the king's edict.

But his real motive for appearing at the gates of the king's palace was to get Esther to use her position as queen to appeal to the king on behalf of her people. It was time for her to reveal her true identity to the king. Mordecai had been the one to counsel her to keep her Hebrew heritage a secret. And to this point in the story, Esther had done just that. King Ahasuerus had no idea that his new queen was actually a Jew. But given the dire change in circumstances, Mordecai has changed his tune and begs his niece to drop the charade and use her access to the king to make an appeal. Mordecai believes that she is where she is for a reason. She has been put in this place of royal influence for a divine purpose that is far greater than either one of them could have ever imagined. All the pieces of the story are starting to come together. All the characters in the story have had their parts to play. From King Ahasuerus to his recalcitrant queen, Vashti; Mordecai and his adopted niece, Esther, and the two plotting assassins to the pride-filled, and revenge-obsessed Haman. Nothing has happened by chance. And while God has yet to be mentioned, He has been there all along. And Mordecai seems to sense that there is a divine agenda at work in this seemingly hopeless scenario. His niece is the queen of Persia. Who could have ever imagined something so far-fetched and unlikely? You see, we read this story and automatically wonder why God would allow someone like Haman to rise to power and have the power to demand the destruction of the people of God. But what we should be wondering is why God would allow Esther, an inconsequential, orphaned Hebrew girl to ascend to the queen's throne. Mordecai didn't waste his time worrying about Haman and his need for vengeance. He saw a God-given opportunity in Esther and wasted no time in begging her to see her role as a godsend.

For Such A Time As This.

Esther 4:9-17

And Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. Then Esther spoke to Hathach and commanded him to go to Mordecai and say, "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live. But as for me, I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days."

And they told Mordecai what Esther had said. Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish." Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him. – Esther 4:9-17 ESV

Desperate times call for desperate measures. When Mordecai sent word to Esther, his adopted niece, commanding her to go to King Ahasuerus and beg his favor and plead with him on behalf of her people, he knew he was asking her to risk everything. He was well aware that she was going to have to reveal her long-hidden secret about her Hebrew heritage. There was no way to know how the king might react to this news. But Mordecai knew that they had no other choice. The way he looked at it was that Esther was their only hope. And he viewed her presence in the palace as a literal godsend. She had been sent by God for such a time as this. Her position as queen had not been a case of good fortune, but the result of God's sovereign plan. God had known all along what was about to take place. He knew the heart of Haman. He was fully cognizant of the fact that Haman was a descendant of the Amalakitites, long-standing enemies of the Jews. God had not been surprised by the king's edict. He was not up in heaven wringing His hands in despair, left to come up with a last-minute plan to save His people. He had been orchestrating His plan all along, long before Haman got promoted or had his feelings hurt by Mordecai, and well in advance of this latest man-made calamity. As the people of God, it is essential that we remember the words found in Proverbs: "Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand" (Proverbs 19:21 ESV). In the book of Isaiah, we hear these foreboding, yet also comforting words from God:

"I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose...'" – Isaiah 46:9-10 ESV

Mordecai was in mourning, but he was not morose. He had not lost hope. He had no idea why these

events were taking place. His sack cloth and ashes were more a sign of submission to God than anything else. He was acknowledging to God his sadness over the king's edict, and his complete dependence upon God's help. His call to Esther to use her position as the queen to appeal on behalf of her people was an act of belief that God was at work and that Esther was part of His divine plan.

For Esther, the news was devastating. But the command from her uncle to use her position to beg the king's favor was frightening. She could not simply walk into the king's presence at any time. She had to be invited. And the passage makes it clear that it had been a month since she had last received an invitation into the king's presence. To dare to enter the king's inner chambers without his express permission meant death. But Esther recognized the wisdom of Mordecai's words and the cold, hard reality that she, above all people, had the best chance of changing the king's mind. So she boldly proclaimed, "I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16 ESV).

It is important to note that Mordecai and Esther did not leave everything up to God. They seemed to know that God was at work, but that He had placed them where they were for a reason. They both had vital parts to play. Mordecai appealed to Esther. Esther was going to fast and pray, then appeal to the king. She called on Mordecai to call all the Jews in the capital of Susa to fast and pray as well. They were to be active. They were each to do their part. But they were all putting their hope and trust in God. Even Esther knew that it was going to take an act of God to prepare the king's heart to extend to her an invitation into his presence and a willingness to listen to her plea. She seemed to recognize that her ascension to her position as queen had been a coincidence. It had been a case of providence and the real purpose for her God-ordained role was now being revealed. She had been born "for such a time as this. The conquering of Judah by the Babylonians, the loss of her parents, her adoption by Mordecai, her exile to Persia, and her miraculous rise to royal prominence had all been the work of God. And the seeming method behind God's madness was being made known. She had a job to do. She was going to be part of God's divine plan to accomplish His will concerning the people of Israel. I am reminded of the attitude that young David had when he stood against the Philistine warrior, Goliath. Armed with nothing more than a sling and a few stones, he boldly proclaimed:

"Today the Lord will conquer you, and I will kill you and cut off your head. And then I will give the dead bodies of your men to the birds and wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel! And everyone assembled here will know that the Lord rescues his people, but not with sword and spear. This is the Lord's battle, and he will give you to us!" – 1 Samuel 17:46-47 ESV

It was the Lord's battle, but David still had to fight. He would be the one to sling the stone that took Goliath's life, but the victory would be God's, not his. Like David, Esther was going to have to use the resources at her disposal and step into the battle. God had placed her there for a reason. She was going to have to step into the king's presence, confident in the fact that God was with her and had actually gone before her. This was the Lord's battle.

An Instrument in God's Hands.

Esther 5:1-8

On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, in front of the king's quarters, while the king was sitting on his royal throne inside the throne room opposite the entrance to the palace. And when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won favor in his sight, and he held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter. And the king said to her, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom." And Esther said, "If it please the king, let the king and Haman come today to a feast that I have prepared for the king." Then the king said, "Bring Haman quickly, so that we may do as Esther has asked." So the king and Haman came to the feast that Esther had prepared. And as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king said to Esther, "What is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled." Then Esther answered, "My wish and my request is: If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my wish and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come to the feast that I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said." – Esther 5:1-8 ESV

It is important to remember that Esther has just spent three full days fasting. And, no doubt, she spent those three days seeking direction and protection from God. She was going to have to go before the king and not only confess the fact that she had been hiding that she was a Jew, but beg him to rescind his edict that had doomed them to destruction. This was not going to be easy. And the result for her personally could be deadly. It had been a month since the king had invited her into his presence, and unless you were invited, your presence was forbidden, under penalty of death. The reason the three days of prayer and fasting are so important is that they explain so much of Esther's behavior in this passage. She has a plan. She does not come into the king's presence unprepared or "winging it." She has had three days to call out to God and ask for His help. The result is that she is able to come before the king with confidence and a well-thought-out strategy to achieve her objective: the salvation of her people.

The salvation of God is not always accomplished through a mighty miracle where we simply stand back and watch in awe and wonder. Sometimes God chooses to work through His people, using them to accomplish His will through their apparent weakness. When God chose Moses to lead His people out of captivity in Egypt, Moses argued with Him, claiming to be the wrong person for the job. But God simply responded:

"Who makes a person's mouth? Who decides whether people speak or do not speak, hear or do not hear, see or do not see? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go! I will be with you as you speak, and I will instruct you in what to say." – Exodus 4:11-12 NLT

Now God was going to do something similar with Esther. She simply needed to go and allow God to give her the words to say. He would be with her, guiding her thoughts and preparing the heart of the

king to receive what she had to say. Jesus gave His disciples similar words of encouragement, telling them that they would have all the divine help they would need when the time came.

And when you are brought to trial in the synagogues and before rulers and authorities, don't worry about how to defend yourself or what to say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what needs to be said. – Luke 12:11-12 NLT

God was going to use Esther to accomplish His will, and it seems clear from the story that He had given Esther very specific instructions as to how she was to approach the king and present her case for the Hebrew people.

But one of the first hurdles that had to be overcome was that of gaining entrance into the king's presence. She had not been invited. So she chose to dress up in her royal robes and stand outside the court, patiently waiting for him to see her and extend an invitation. And her strategy worked. He did just that. But surprisingly, he asked her a remarkable question: "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom" (Esther 5:3 ESV). With that kind of opportunity, it could have been easy for Esther to blurt out her request right then and there. But she waited. The time was not yet right. This was a complicated and delicate matter that required great wisdom and patience. But she took advantage of the king's generous reception and invited he and Haman to a feast. She appealed to his vanity and his extreme love for festivities. The king was never one to turn down a party invitation, and it is interesting to note that Esther had already prepared the feast. She went into this encounter with the king with a certain degree of confidence and faith that God was going to work things out. And the king immediately sent for Haman so they could take advantage of the food and wine that Esther had prepared for them.

After the king and Haman had been satiated on the fine foods prepared for them and satisfied in their own self-importance, Esther served them wine. Then the king asked again, "What is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled" (Esther 5:6 ESV). And Esther responded again by inviting the king and Haman to yet another feast on the following day. She was working her plan to perfection. We may not be able to see the strategy behind her efforts. We might even believe she is simply putting off the inevitable. But there is far too much planning and calculation involved to write this off as a case of procrastination. She knows exactly what she is doing. And it would appear that she is doing exactly what God has told her to do. God is accomplishing His will through her. He is implementing His plan by utilizing one of His children. He is using the weak to confound the wise. God is great, but He oftentimes chooses to work through the powerless to shame those who think they are powerful. Esther was an instrument in the hands of the Redeemer. She was a willing tool ready to be used by God to accomplish His plan.

Pride & Prejudice.

Esther 5:9-14

And Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart. But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he neither rose nor trembled before him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai. Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home, and he sent and brought his friends and his wife Zeresh. And Haman recounted to them the splendor of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honored him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and the servants of the king. Then Haman said, "Even Queen Esther let no one but me come with the king to the feast she prepared. And tomorrow also I am invited by her together with the king. Yet all this is worth nothing to me, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Let a gallows fifty cubits high be made, and in the morning tell the king to have Mordecai hanged upon it. Then go joyfully with the king to the feast." This idea pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made. – Esther 5:9-14 ESV

The Proverbs of Solomon have a lot to say about pride:

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. – Proverbs 16:18 ESV

One's pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor. – Proverbs 29:23 ESV

When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom. – Proverbs 11:2 ESV

Before destruction a man's heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor. – Proverbs 18:2 ESV

Even James quotes from Proverbs 3:34 when he writes, "But he [God] gives more grace. Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble'" (James 4:6 ESV).

Here in the story, we are given a photo-realistic image of what a prideful, haughty man looks like. Haman is the epitome of the arrogant, conceited, self-seeking and pride-filled man who lives for nothing more than the vain pursuit of prominence, power and possessions. Haman was a ladder-climbing, boss-flattering, limelight-seeking opportunist. He was in it for himself. He was obsessed with recognition and rewards, respect and his own reputation. He is the anti-Mordecai. Mordecai seems to remain behind the scenes, adopting his orphaned niece and raising her like his own daughter, discovering the plot against the king's life and making it known – never expecting a reward for his efforts. But Haman is busy promoting himself and planning what he believes to be his well-deserved rise to fame and fortune.

When Haman left the feast given by Esther for he and the king alone, we are told he "went out that day joyful and glad of heart" (Esther 5:9 ESV). He was ecstatic, thrilled at having been the only one invited to this private party thrown by the queen herself. He was so elated that when he got home, he told his

wife and friends all about it. “Even Queen Esther let no one but me come with the king to the feast she prepared. And tomorrow also I am invited by her together with the king” (Esther 5:12 ESV). He even made it a point to brag to them, recounting “the splendor of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honored him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and the servants of the king” (Esther 5:11 ESV). This man was insufferable. He was nothing more than an egotistical, self-promoting, pretentious fool. But he was also dangerous because he was godless and wicked. He fits the profile of the wicked described in Psalm 10:

*O Lord, why do you stand so far away?
Why do you hide when I am in trouble?
The wicked arrogantly hunt down the poor.
Let them be caught in the evil they plan for others.
For they brag about their evil desires;
they praise the greedy and curse the Lord.
The wicked are too proud to seek God.
They seem to think that God is dead.
Yet they succeed in everything they do.
They do not see your punishment awaiting them.
They sneer at all their enemies.
They think, “Nothing bad will ever happen to us!
We will be free of trouble forever!” – Psalm 10:1-6 NLT*

Haman walked out of the queen’s party on cloud nine, but he was quickly brought back to earth when Mordecai refused to bow down before him. One man’s refusal to acknowledge his obvious superiority was enough to throw him into an emotional tailspin. Even after he arrived home and recounted his amazing good fortune at having been the honored guest at the queen’s private banquet, he lamented, “Yet all this is worth nothing to me, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate” (Esther 5:13 ESV). This statement, and Haman’s subsequent plot reveal the real issue. Mordecai was more than just a single individual who refused to honor Haman as his superior. He was a Jew and Haman was an Amalakite. These two people groups had a long track record filled with animosity and mutual hatred. Since the days when the Israelites were making their way to the promised land, the Amalakites proved to be their enemies. God even commanded King Saul, the very first king of the Jews, to completely wipe out the Amalakites, but he disobeyed. And since that day, the Amalakites had been a proverbial thorn in the side of the Jews. And now all that long-held tension was going to spill over as the result of a dispute between two men: Haman and Mordecai.

For Haman’s wife and friends, the solution was quite simple. All he had to do was kill Mordecai. Just eliminate the problem. And do it in a way that would send a signal to all the rest of the Jewish population in Susa. So they advised Haman to build a gallows, what was really more of a tall stake or spike on which the body of Mordecai would be hung for all to see. But it was essential that Haman waste no time. He needed to move quickly and build the gallows right away, before the party the next day. That way he could eliminate Mordecai and go feast with Esther and the king unperturbed by his arch-nemesis. And the passage simply tells us, “This idea pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made” (Esther

5:14 ESV).

But this brings us back to Psalm 10. The psalmist writes:

*Their helpless victims are crushed;
they fall beneath the strength of the wicked.
The wicked think, "God isn't watching us!
He has closed his eyes and won't even see what we do!"* – Psalm 10:10-11 NLT

Haman believed he could do whatever he wanted to do. His arrogance was so great that he truly thought there would be no repercussions for his actions. He was greater than God. His wealth, power and prominence gave him permission to do whatever he desired to do. But he was going to be proven sorely mistaken. God was watching. His eyes were not closed. He was seeing everything that was going on. And He was in full control. The wicked believe they can act with impunity. And, too often, the godly wrongly assume the wicked are right. Because that is how it appears. As the psalmist says, "they succeed in everything they do" (Psalm 10:5a NLT). But "They do not see your punishment awaiting them" (Psalm 10:5b NLT). Haman believed he was in control. He thought he had the power and authority to do whatever he wished. But he was wrong, and God was about to show him just how wrong he truly was. Haman was about to learn a painful lesson: "The Lord is king forever and ever!" (Psalm 10:16 NLT).

STUDY QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 5

READ ESTHER 6

Go back and look at Esther 2:18-23 to refresh your memory on Mordecai's foiling of the plot against the king's life. Now look at Esther 6:1-3. What led to the king's discovery that Mordecai had never been rewarded for his role in exposing the planned assassination attempt?

When the king realizes that he has not done anything to reward Mordecai, he immediately asks if there is anyone else in the court. It just so happens that Haman is there. According to Esther 5:12-14, what was Haman's reason for being at the court in the first place?

Read verses 6-9 and write down all the things that Haman recommends be done for "the man whom the king delights to honor."

Obviously, there is something unsaid that makes this scene so comical. What is it?

Describe how you think Haman felt after having to lead Mordecai through the streets of Susa.

According to verses 12-13, what is Haman's overall mood after all this and what is the great advice he receives from his wife?

Read the following passages and write down what they teach about God's will and man's plans.

Proverbs 21:1

Psalms 135:5-6

Daniel 4:34-35

2 Chronicles 20:6

Isaiah 43:13

Luke 1:51-53

IMMORTAL INVISIBLE IMMORTAL

THE IMPERCEPTIBLE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

WEEK 4: When Kingdoms Clash – Esther 4-5

MOURNING

*Years passed, and the king of Egypt died. But the Israelites continued to groan under their burden of slavery. They cried out for help, and their cry rose up to God. **God heard** their groaning, and **he remembered** his covenant promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. **He looked down** on the people of Israel **and knew it was time to act.** – Exodus 2:23-25 NLT*

***I have certainly seen** the oppression of my people in Egypt. **I have heard** their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, **I am aware** of their suffering. – Exodus 3:7 NLT*

HEARING

PROVIDENCE

Life is not a straight line leading from one blessing to the next and then finally to heaven. Life is a winding and troubled road. Switchback after switchback. And the point of biblical stories like Joseph and Job and Esther and Ruth is to help us feel in our bones (not just know in our heads) that God is for us in all these strange turns. God is not just showing up after the trouble and cleaning it up. He is plotting the course and managing the troubles with far-reaching purposes for our good and for the glory of Jesus Christ.
– John Piper, *A Sweet and Bitter Providence*

Our cries of
hopelessness indicate our
helplessness and activate
God's **faithfulness.**

*...perhaps there is a deeper providential plan at work that has placed Esther in this fortuitous position, for just such a time as this. – Bryan R. Gregory, *Inconspicuous Providence**

LORD, you know the hopes of the helpless. Surely you will hear their cries and comfort them. – PSALM 10:17 NLT

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed. – PSALM 34:18 NLT

HAMAN

The **wicked** are too proud to seek God.

They seem to think that God is dead. Yet

they succeed in everything they do. They do not see your punishment awaiting them. They sneer at all their enemies. They think, "Nothing bad will ever happen to us! We will be free of trouble forever!" – PSALM 10:4-6 NLT

Light shines in the darkness for the **godly**... Such people will not be overcome by evil. Those who are righteous will be long remembered. They do not fear bad news; they confidently trust the Lord to care for them. They are confident and fearless and can face their foes

triumphantly. – PSALM 112:1, 4-6 NLT

ESTHER

ENEMIES
RULERS
authorities
evil spirits

For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.

– EPHESIANS 6:12 NLT

Making Sense of Suffering

In my suffering I have found that I continued to believe that God created all things from nothing and is my creator. He created me for a reason, and there is no power that can defeat his plans for me. I never lost faith that God is able to guide and govern the world he has made. I was and am certain that he knows how to work all things for good even if I cannot see the way. Though severely tried, I could not let go of my faith that God is trustworthy and good. The image of the crucified and resurrected Son of God gave me hope in the darkest night of my life. For me, the suffering and death of Jesus is the Christian answer – the only answer – to the problem of suffering. In addition, I was helped by the thought that this present world is not God's final goal. My present life with all its joys and sorrows is not the end; therefore I should not live for this world alone and need not worry about the future.

– Ron Highfield, *Be Still My Soul: The Christian and the Providence of God*