

GOD'S HANDS ON HUMAN CLAY

Isaiah 55:8–9; Jeremiah 18:1–5; Daniel 4:35; Romans 8:26–30



LET'S BEGIN HERE

As we anticipate the days, months, and years to come, we have to admit we remain clueless as to what will happen on any given day.

In *God's Hands on Human Clay*, Chuck Swindoll explains the treasured truth that most Christians overlook as the unknown future approaches: God is sovereign. As we encounter life's trials, we can remain confident that the Potter, who causes all things to work for our good, kneads and reshapes us to fashion something beautiful, useful, and practical. Even though the future remains unclear, we can be certain nothing touches our lives unless it has first flowed through the "molding" fingers of our loving God.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Wrestling with God's Providence (Isaiah 55:8–9)

Providence is God's timely provision for the needs of His people; His purposeful interventions in our lives; and His loving care over us, making certain that everything that happens fits into His plan for our good and His glory.

But trusting in God's providence is hard. When pain and suffering come crashing in, we wrestle with whether or not God really cares. We struggle in two primary areas:

- *First, we tend to focus on the immediate, but God focuses on the ultimate.* Our human existence within space and time confines our perspective. We want answers, clarity, and relief *now!* God's eternal perspective, on the other hand, keeps Him focused on what will *ultimately* be best for us.
- *Second, we forget that our knowledge is limited, but God's is unlimited.* We can only understand what God enables us to understand. Only the Lord has perfect knowledge of the edges of the universe and every moment in time. But we *know* Him and His love for us.



Quotable

*God's plan
this year includes a
cultivation of
our character
to make us
more like His
beloved Son.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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2. Thinking Through God's Providence (Romans 8:26–30)

When we latch on to the truth of God's providential care and make it the foundation stone upon which we build our lives, it will completely transform our attitude. God's providence, once understood, can calm our fears and bring great comfort in even the most trying times. And when circumstances tempt us to doubt, we can release our white-knuckle grip on our lives and claim the unconditional promise in Romans 8:28.

The unconditional promise in Romans 8:28 has four parts and four truths to believe:

- “**And we know . . .**” *This promise is to be claimed, not ignored.* We can have absolute, unshakeable confidence in God's providence.
- “. . . **God causes . . .**” *The project is God's, not ours.* God is the Potter and we are the clay. He will conform us to the image of His Son, and He will use difficulties to complete His work in us.
- “. . . **all things to work together . . .**” *The plan is total, not partial.* God can see all of eternity at once and uses each circumstance for our ultimate good and His glory.
- “. . . **for good.**” *The purpose is good, not evil.* Our heavenly Father will never cause or allow anything to cross our paths that would be to our detriment or have an evil purpose.



A CLOSER LOOK

Joseph: Factoring God's Providence into Our Pain

Joseph's brothers had done him wrong, and now, he had the power to get even . . . in spades! Humanly speaking, when faced with people who have “done us wrong,” average individuals would likely frown and demand, “You think you know what humiliation is all about. You wait until I'm through with you!” But not Joseph. He was a changed man. He had learned to entrust his life to God's providential work. So, many long years after his brothers sold him into slavery, Joseph looked into their anxious eyes and said, “It was not you who sent me here, but God.”

We all have memories that haunt us and ongoing pain because of someone's wrongdoing. Each of us, at one time or another, has been treated badly. When others hurt us, our perspective tends to get cloudy. We remember the manipulation, the unfair treatment, but we forget that God is still at work. Though the Lord doesn't force people to commit evil, He promises to mature us through it and bring Himself glory.

Joseph said to his brothers, “You meant it for evil.” He wasn't living in denial. There was nothing good in their motives—and he said so. “But God”! Here is where Joseph allowed his theology to eclipse his human emotions and bad memories—an excellent trade-off.

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Attitude is crucial in the life of the Christian. We can go through Sunday motions, pack Bibles under our arms, and sing songs from memory, yet all the while harboring grudges against the people who have wronged us. In our own way—perhaps even with a little religious manipulation—we'll get back at them.

But that is not God's way. In Joseph, God showed us the right way. He gave us an example of a great man—someone gracious, generous, and forgiving. Someone who lived his life on the firm foundation of God's providence.



LET'S LIVE IT

God's underlying plan, His providential goal for us, is to make us look more like His Son. When the bottom drops out of our lives, we can stand on God's providence—His loving care over us by which He ensures that everything that happens fits into His plan for our good and His glory.

Have you experienced any trials that have challenged your faith in God's providence? Did you overcome your doubt? If so, how?



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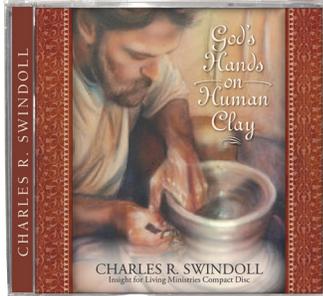
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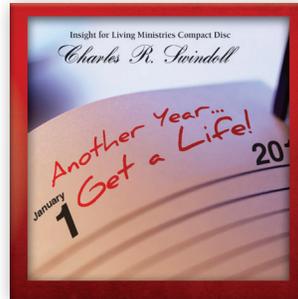
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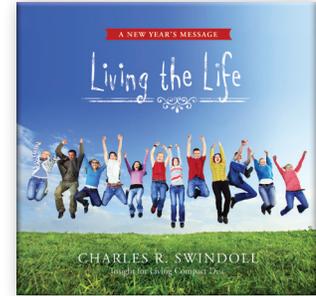
Tools for Digging Deeper



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