

OVERVIEW OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

The operation of the Divine providence to save a person begins at the person's birth and continues to the end of his life, and afterward to eternity.

(Divine Providence 332)

The Lord wants nothing more than to bring happiness to everyone that He has created. But He knows that we cannot be happy unless we are free to choose between loving what is good or loving what is evil. So the Lord protects our freedom while leading us toward the greatest happiness that we will accept.

READ: "How Divine Providence Works" by the Rev. B. David Holm *(for teens and adults)*

This article gives a good overview of Divine providence which is the Lord's government of all that happens in the universe. On the topic of evil, Holm writes, "We must understand that 'the permission of evil' is also part of the Divine providence. Evil is never intended or sent by the Lord.... Evil is reluctantly permitted by the Lord, for the sake of human freedom and for the sake of salvation. If we are truly free, then we must be free even to turn from the Lord and do evil. In no other way can we be brought into heaven freely...."

SING: "O Lord, Help Us Turn Our Hearts to You"



JONAH AND THE GREAT FISH

Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah.
And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

(Jonah 1:17)

Jonah was called to be prophet of the Lord, but he balked when the Lord told him to go to Nineveh and warn the people to turn from their evil ways. Jonah got on a ship instead and fell sound asleep. The ensuing tempest and Jonah's time in the belly of the great fish picture the unhappiness that we bring on ourselves when we deliberately act against the Lord's directions. Even still, the Lord protected Jonah and brought him safely ashore, giving Jonah another chance to change his ways.

READ: "How the Lord Saved Jonah" by the Rev. Kurt Horigan Asplundh

A retelling of the story for young children with beautiful color illustrations.

READ: "The Prophet Jonah" *(for children)*

This article shows how the Lord tried to teach Jonah to be merciful and kind when Jonah disobeyed the Lord because of his hatred toward the Assyrians.

FAMILY WORSHIP: Jonah and the Great Fish

Read the selected portions of the story from Jonah 1 and 2.

Discussion Ideas:

- Why did the Lord want Jonah to go to Nineveh? (To tell the people there that they were being evil.)
- Why did Jonah disobey the Lord and get onto the ship for another destination? (The Lord wanted Jonah to prophesy outside of his own country, but Jonah disapproved. He wanted the Assyrians to be destroyed rather than given an opportunity to turn away from evil and be saved.)
- What happened to the ship while Jonah slept onboard? (The Lord sent a tempest or storm that threatened to break up the ship.)
- How did the sailors find out who brought this danger to them? (By casting lots. The Old and New Testaments mention several instances of casting lots for guidance as to how to proceed or who was at fault.)
- How did the sailors respond when Jonah told them to throw him overboard? (They were very reluctant and first tried every other means of saving the ship and their lives.)
- What was the miracle that saved Jonah's life? (The Lord prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah and safely bring him back to land. The Lord knows what we are going to do and is always ready to help us.)
- There are several ways that the story of Jonah teaches us about the permission of evil. Evil actions—such as Jonah's disobedience—have consequences that can affect other people such as the sailors in the story of Jonah. When we are spiritually asleep—pictured by Jonah sleeping on the ship—consequences can help us recognize that what we have done is evil. Jonah being thrown overboard and spending time in the belly of the great fish pictures a state of temptation—being torn between doing what is good or persisting in what is evil. Jonah prayed to the Lord for help just as we should ask the Lord to help us fight temptations, and the Lord caused the fish to put Jonah on land. The rest of the story of Jonah shows that he was not done with his spiritual struggles and that the Lord continued to lead him toward doing what is good and true.
- Note: In this and other Old Testament stories it appears that the Lord punishes those who do evil, but it is actually an evil influence from hell which people invite into their life that causes the punishment. All evil originates in hell and the Lord works nonstop to moderate the severity of it.

ACTIVITY: Dramatizing the Story of Jonah *(ages 9-14)*

The script is adapted from Jonah 1, 2. Use the readers' theater technique—letting people read their parts aloud with the script in hand while dramatizing the story.

COLORING PAGES:

[Jonah Sleeps During the Storm](#)

[Casting Lots](#)

[Throwing Jonah into the Sea](#)

[Jonah Inside the Great Fish](#)

PROJECT: Jonah and the Stormy Sea *(ages 8-12)*

Color the drawings and then follow the directions to make a 3 dimensional picture.

PROJECT: Jonah Swallowed by the Great Fish *(ages 3-6)*

Another way to make a 3 dimensional fish that can swallow Noah.

For Parents: Taking a Jonah Time Out *(adapted from the Early Childhood Program)*

If timeouts are part of your approach to disciplining your children, you might want to compare this to the “time out” that Jonah had while inside the great fish. During this time, he prayed to the Lord and apologized for not listening to Him. Like Jonah, they can ask the Lord to help them and remember that the Lord is always with them.

ACTIVITY: Sequencing the Story of Jonah *(ages 4-8)*

Use the colorful picture cards to sequence the story.

FREEDOM

*A person is continually led by the Lord in freedom.
(Divine Providence 43)*

To become truly free, we need to follow the Lord. The world tends to view freedom as the absence of natural restraints. The Heavenly Doctrine amplifies this idea to show that a higher form of freedom, spiritual freedom, is to freely accept the Lord’s leadership. This often requires restraint from our selfish desires.

READ: “True Freedom” by the Rev. Patrick A. Rose *(for adults)*

“We are not born solely for natural freedom and the pleasures that go with it. We are spiritual beings, and we are born so that we might experience spiritual pleasure as well. And it is the freedom to enjoy such things—the freedom to love the Lord above all, the freedom to love the truth of His Word, and the freedom to love the good in our fellow human beings—it is this which is freedom itself.”

READ: “Four Kinds of Freedom” by the Rev. Daniel Goodenough *(for teens and up)*

Explores four types of freedom:

1. Free will or liberty – the freedom to choose between good and evil.
2. Heavenly freedom – a beautiful kind of freedom that the Lord can give us if we love what is good and turn away from evil.
3. Hellish freedom – a result of spending our life on earth trying to please ourselves and make ourselves happy rather than trying to make other people happy.
4. Freedom of action in the world – freedom to do and speak as we please except as limited by laws and the consequences of breaking them.

QUOTES: Comparing Freedom to Aspects of Nature *(for teens and adults)*

PROJECT: Picturing True Freedom *(ages 8-12)*

Draw a picture of the Lord leading someone “as if by the hand.”

ACTIVITY: Free As a... *(ages 9 and up)*

How would you finish the sentence: “Free as a _____.” Brainstorm several endings and then choose your favorite. Why do you think it best expresses the concept of freedom?

COLORING PAGE: Like Deer Roaming Free

READ: “Should We Leave Our Children in Freedom?” by the Rt. Rev. Alfred A. Acton

This article for parents describes the kinds of freedom that children need at different ages and how we can work with the Lord to lead our children toward true spiritual freedom.

PROJECT: Where’s Your Head? (*ages 12 and up*)

This project illustrates how a person’s priorities and motivation affect how they appear in the light of the spiritual world.

PROJECT: Chains of Evil (*ages 10-14*)

A passage in the Heavenly Doctrine says that a person who embraces evil loves becomes bound by chains of evil that he doesn’t feel until after death, when he makes the transition to hell. This teaching may remind us of the appearance of Bob Marley’s ghost in Charles Dickens’s book, *The Christmas Carol*. Ebenezer Scrooge is visited by Marley, his former partner, who carries heavy chains and says of them, “I wear the chain I forged in life.... I made it link by link...and of my own free will I wore it.”

Choose one of these projects to illustrate this teaching, make a paper chain with an evil action written on each loop or making a picture of an evil person bound by chains. Add a caption such as: “Chains of evil bind a person who cares only about himself.”

PERMITTING EVIL

*Leaving a person in freedom to do even what is bad is permission.
(Arcana Coelestia 10778)*

With our natural eyes alone it is difficult to see how the Lord can be all powerful when we observe so much disorder and outright evil happening in our world. To understand that the Lord can still be in charge and yet not have a particle of evil in Him, we must turn to His teachings in the Heavenly Doctrine on “permissions of evil.” Our Heavenly Father permits or allows many things to happen that He does not will.

READ: “Divine Providence and Tragedy” by the Rev. Lawson Smith (*for adults*)

The Lord respects our freedom because He loves us. He respects it so much that He allows us to get into trouble, and then as far as we are willing, He brings us new strength out of our troubles. He is constantly, though quietly, working with us, encouraging and warning, providing us with circumstances and opportunities to make the spiritual, eternal choices we want to make.

ACTIVITY: Of the Lord’s Will or Permission? (*for teens and adults*)

Brainstorm a list of events that happen in the world such as the birth of a baby, a hurricane devastating a city, *etc.* Then note which of these things are of the Lord’s will and which are evils that are permitted.

JOURNAL PAGE: Recognizing Evil for What It Is (*for teens and adults*)

Seeing an evil (and the consequences of evil actions) helps us recognize evil for what it is. Write about an evil that you have seen.

CONSEQUENCES

It is a law of Divine order that good holds within itself its own reward, which is heaven. So too evil holds within itself its own punishment, which is hell.
(*Arcana Coelestia* 9033:2)

What are the consequences of our actions? In general, people reap what they sow. Doing what is good brings happiness to them. Doing what is evil to other people brings unhappiness and punishment to the doers. In this way, the laws of order restrain those who wish to do what is evil and encourage those who want to do what is good.

Unfortunately, the nature of evil is that it harms other people as well. In an article called “Why Did the Lord Let It Happen?” the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss explains that evil “is evil because it brings harm and unhappiness that people do not deserve.... When we realize that it is inevitable for evil to harm others, and appreciate that it is not the Lord’s fault that it is so, then we can be more sensitive to the wrongs we do to others by our bad choices.”

READ: “Divine Providence and the Permission of Evil” by the Rt. Rev. George de Charms

This article explores the influence of angels and evil spirits, keeping us in spiritual equilibrium to make free choices. If we insist on choosing to do what is evil, the Lord “causes good spirits and angels to draw near and restore the balance or equilibrium of our minds. This enables us to change our minds and choose the good, if we are willing.”

ACTIVITY: The Domino Effect (*ages 9 and up*)

Have you ever set up a long row of dominoes and then set them in motion by knocking the first one over? This is one way to illustrate the concept that every moment of life holds a chain of consequences that stretch into eternity (*Arcana Coelestia* 6490).

WHEN THE LORD FORESEES EVIL

The nature of the Lord’s providence is such that it is linked together with foresight....
For evil things are foreseen, but good ones are provided.
(*Arcana Coelestia* 6489)

The Lord never wants something evil to happen, but He foresees evil and mitigates its effect to some extent by providing that some good will come of it. Though it can be difficult for us to see the good, we can take comfort in this teaching that the Lord never allows anything to happen unless something good may come out of it (*Arcana Coelestia* 6489).

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Bringing Something Good from Evil

When hard things happen in our lives and the lives of those we love, we sometimes wonder how a loving God can allow them to happen. These quotes from the Lord’s Word and questions for discussion may help us reflect on the way the Lord brings something good out of every evil that impacts us.