

## Never Random

### How God Manages the World

Ramesh Richard

**November 23, 2013.** I still remember the day as if it were yesterday—sitting on a flight leaving the Philippines for Japan, during one of the loneliest periods of my life. Two years prior, RREACH had begun discussions with the Philippines Council of Evangelical Churches to host the 2016 Global Proclamation Congress in Manila. Several board members from both organizations had witnessed a formal signing ceremony of the memorandum of understanding in February 2012.

National leaders and local donors had been scheduled to meet there again on November 21, 2013, to further the steps toward this historic, tide-changing event. I would be flying to Manila from Singapore. But on my way there, I received an unexpected email from our main host, asking if just the two of us could meet instead. On November 8, 2013, the strongest typhoon ever to make landfall had disrupted the lives of 4 million people in the Philippines and killed at least 8,000. Terrible reports poured in about the devastation; relief organizations called it a ten-year reconstruction project.

The private meeting was quiet. My friend silently wept for about 40 minutes, the weight of his nation's catastrophe resting on his shoulders. At the end, I reminded him that my colleague had wisely included a clause before the signing: "Barring acts of God in natural and personal disaster, each party will execute the agreed-upon expectations at the highest levels of effective and efficient execution."

RREACH would relieve him and his organization of their obligation. We had no clue where God would take us. He and his board chair met me the next morning with confirmation of simple inability: "All our human and financial resources must be redeployed to the disaster area, and there is nothing we can do."

This narrative of apparent defeat, delay, failure, and loss illustrates a crucial truth: human beings must make prudent plans to the best of our ability, but trust God to direct and establish our steps (Proverbs 16:1, 3, 9, 33).

Yet, you may ask, exactly what and how do we trust? *How shall we understand divine sovereignty in the midst of our human endeavors and experiences?* We shall return to our opening story soon, but a foundational point first—with a disclaimer.

### **Our Foundation, with a Disclaimer**

A biblical, theological, and pastoral article with an early proviso may seem like poor writing, but how safely should I approach this attempt at understanding the deep—though not the dark—things of God? Pursuing this matter of how the Omnitasker thinks, moves, and works invokes a potential for error.

With a meager mind when thinking thoughts after God and speaking about Him, I dare not lead you astray. I could and would, except for the protection and certainty of God's revelation through the Lord Jesus and His written Word about these complex matters of divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

I shall stick to what is known and knowable

from Scripture, leaving everything else to conjecture. Like much theology that connects Scripture with philosophy, which brilliantly asks but cannot adequately answer questions, we engage this incredible subject—one that will take all eternity to unroll.

**“ To begin to understand how God thinks, moves, and works, we first establish a Scriptural foundation for who He is. ”**

Here's an unusual thought elicited by gratitude mixed with wonder: Will eternity itself actually be *long enough* to fully discover and appreciate the providential outworkings of God in human history, personal circumstances, and the natural order?

It is no surprise that worship becomes the default preoccupation of heaven. When faith becomes sight, we'll first say, shout, and sing repeatedly, "Oh Wow!" And soon after, our second utterance upon entering heaven will be "I see." To begin to understand how God thinks, moves, and works, we first establish a Scriptural foundation for who He is. Scripture reveals God as:

- **Eternal planner** (Job 42:2; Psalm 139:13–16; Ephesians 1:11; 2:10)
- **Personal creator** (Genesis 1:1; John 1:1; Hebrews 11:3; Colossians 1:16)
- **Global sustainer** (Psalm 33:6–9; 145:15–16; Matthew 5:45; Acts 14:17; Colossians 1:17)
- **Sovereign ruler** (Psalm 103:19; 148:7–8; Acts 4:27–28)
- **Final savior** (Isaiah 43:11; John 3:17; 1 Timothy 4:10)

By definition and causation, God is over all reality—actual or notional, virtual or augmented, mediated or experienced, observable or abstract, objective or subjective,

conceptual or physical. If God is not over the sum of all reality, God is not God. He is greater than all He has brought into being and separate from what He has caused to exist.

But God is more than founder, creator, and owner; He is also controller, administrator, and manager. He preserves this world and provides for its occupants with food and good things, all as unobligated mercies. Much in the universe may seem to occur randomly, but God's care for us should not and never does (Luke 12:6-7). To intensify our emphasis through accumulated negatives (and poor grammar), there is "no nothing never" whimsy or arbitrary or random in divine providence.

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In active governance, God oversees and undergirds the historical process, directing all movement of reality toward his purposes—its destiny. Nothing is left to fate, chance, or waste in the Omnithinker's administration. He envisions and implements, empowers and regulates, coordinates and completes—and most importantly, He strategizes and wins.

Ultimately, God, the Omnimover, shepherds all reality toward His bottom line: His own glory. If there should be any glory at all, only one person rightly deserves it—God Himself. For Him alone, calling for His value to be acknowledged by the universe is right rather than wrong.

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Since God is simple—not made up of parts as we are—all of God's thoughts, movements, and workings are integrated. We distinguish these dimensions only for our understanding:

how God thinks (providence), moves (concurrence), and works (governance).

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## How God Thinks

*Providence*, from the Latin *providentia* (Greek *pronoia*), means to “take thought for”—looking ahead and shaping strategy toward a purpose. It relates to vision, foresight, and planning. Providence moves divine sovereignty from an abstract concept toward practical accomplishment of God's plans and purposes under His knowledge and supervision.

Providence applies sovereignty to divine strategy over:

- **All reality**—visible and invisible, spiritual principalities and powers, political thrones and dominions.
- **All nature**—creation in all its layers and phenomena, including natural and physical disasters.
- **All history**—past, present, and future, including that of individuals, societies, and cultures.
- **All people**—general and specific situations, personal and moral conditions, and relationships.

Providence raises the challenging question: Why would God create beings that choose a path away from Him? As free creatures *must* act according to their free nature, they sadly choose the alternate way. The horrific consequences of such freedom affect all reality, nature, history, and people.

Yet this God who “takes thought for” the human race has planned our rescue and purposed the restoration of all reality to His/its original intent. Those who recognize their lostness can freely receive His way of salvation

forever. Meanwhile, in patient providence, until the last salvation-opening is filled, God cares enough to keep history and people going with His active governance.



Consider my chess games with our nine-year-old granddaughter. Each game grows more difficult to win as she improves. At this point, I know her next three or four moves and can influence her free choices without her feeling “unfree” or aware of my influence. When I explained this to her, she protested, “You know my next move? That’s not fair!” I had to explain a difficult philosophical concept: I influence the movement toward her choice without causing the choice of her movement.

Similarly, God, like a master chess player, knows all our moves and influences them with His moves, without us knowing His knowledge or feeling unfree. He doesn’t cause the choice of our moves, but He knows and works through them toward His purposes.

This world is neither the best possible world (that would be heaven) nor the worst possible world (that would be hell). It’s the best actual and necessary means to the best actual and necessary world, where eventually free creatures will freely choose to worship God with unceasing wonder, finally understanding His strategies for our very best with unending comprehension, filled with unremitting gratitude.

## How God Moves

*Concurrence* addresses how divine sovereignty accompanies human responsibility—how God moves. The nature of God as Sovereign is a proposition of both faith (as taught in Scripture) and logic. Human responsibility is not only taught in Scripture, but also lived through experience.

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I won’t try to demystify the mystery of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. These biblical pillars run parallel to one another, neither in logical contradiction nor experiential opposition. They are complementary, not supplementary. One does not add to the other. Both cooperate and concur—the former operating from the eternal dimension where God experiences time and space differently than humans, the latter operating in earthly time and space with genuinely experienced freedom.

God doesn’t diminish the humanity of humanity or His divinity as divinity. Some guidance in reducing this tension comes from neither confusing nor compromising the divinity or humanity of Christ—a principle we can apply to understanding divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

Concurrence calls us to pray and act without obligating, manipulating, or negotiating with God. We can’t move God, not because He is emotionless or distant, but because He personally operates from the eternal realm. We ask, seek, and knock, then act, according to the wisdom and freedom He has given us, aligning with His values and vision while giving Him final say.

I work for and with God, always recognizing that God works through me, but mostly without me. Most of how God thinks is unknown to me, how He moves is unfelt by me, and how He works is unseen by me.

## How God Works

**Governance** relates to God's personal administering of everything—how God works. He is neither part of created reality nor absent from any of it at any time or place. He oversees, maintains, and intervenes according to His

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wisdom and knowledge, with His power and authority, in His love and goodness.

Through Scripture study and human observation, I offer a four-fold description, not a prescription, of God's works and ways:

### • **Conventional Works and Ways**

God works through how reality is normally arranged and operates. Science identifies and harnesses what is observed, using the reliability of phenomena to propose theories and laws. Such uniformity reveals God's love and goodness, enabling human progress.

### • **Interventional Works and Ways**

God works through special interventions, often in response to His children's prayers. He flawlessly times His protections, preventions, and provisions. Theologians call this intervention “special providence,” and it is usually detected by a precise timing that reveals God's wisdom and knowledge, in addition to his acts of love and goodness.

### • **Contraventional Works and Ways**

God works through miracles, where physical

nature is contravened, scientific “laws” are breached, and usual ways seem violated. This demonstrates God's wisdom and knowledge, love and goodness, as well as His power and

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authority over all reality, in speeding, stopping, slowing, or shifting the normal to accomplish His purposes.

Let's be careful not to label everything a miracle. Your child's birth is matchless and marvelous, but not miraculous—that's general providence. A child born to an aged woman—as with Sarah and Abraham (Genesis 18:10-11; 21:1), Elizabeth and Zechariah (Luke 1:15-19)—points to special providence. The virgin birth of Jesus, however, is miraculous, for nature was suspended, but not arbitrarily altered to accomplish God's purposes.

### • **Transventional Works and Ways**

Here I coin a word (to keep the pattern!) because God also works in transformative ways that have no reference to nature. Spiritual transformations such as illuminating dark souls in salvation or softening hard hearts to forgive

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may be even harder than physical miracles because our souls and hearts can still proudly say no and often delay in considering God's thoughts, moves, and works.



## The Story Continues ...

Back to November 23, 2013, on that lonely flight from Manila to Tokyo. I wrote in my journal, “Lord, I don’t know what you are saying or where we are going.” But God was working invisibly, preparing this journal statement to be appreciated years later with wonder, love, and praise:

**Nature:** We relocated to Bangkok, Thailand. God opened the way to an imposing convention center—among the best locations for a large global event.

**Politics:** A military coup in Thailand decreased international tourist traffic and helped RREACH secure the best venue rates in the center’s history.

**Economics:** Currency fluctuations during contract signing saved us 9% when the US dollar peaked at just the right moment.

**Leadership:** When our Thai host suffered a fatal heart attack 47 days before our global congress, his organization, Campus Crusade Thailand, still rallied young volunteers and provided event management resources at little or no cost. Our former Philippines host became Secretary General of the World Evangelical Alliance in 2015—a role he couldn’t have easily accepted had he been managing a global event.

**“ God enables prayer to accomplish His will. ”**

**Impact:** God surprised us with over 2,500 registered pastoral trainers from more than 100 countries, enabling RREACH to exceed its four-year goals before time and under budget.

## A Providential Life

How do we live under God’s providence? With personal assurance and prayerful dependence.

Understanding how God thinks, moves, and works generates *personal assurance*:

**Confidence:** Regardless of circumstances, we can trust God’s deliverance and guidance. We may be fallen and broken, but we need not be shaken. In life’s extremities, His right hand of power, wisdom, and goodness will hold and lead us. Trust in God is the fundamental stance of the believer, confiding in Him and committing one’s burdens to Him even in the middle of doubt, suffering, and evil.

**Comfort:** God’s governance gives perspective on the past. I keep notes of how providence appears in the simplest details—cancellations, provisions, protections.

**“ Understanding how God thinks, moves, and works generates *personal assurance*. ”**

Such gratitude prevents depression and pulls me from discouragement with hope. Because of providence, I sometimes smile at circumstances even while weeping, knowing God controls all outcomes.

**Courage:** The courage to pray, decide, act, and endure requires theological convictions about providence. I tweak St. Augustine to read: “Pray because it all depends on God; work as if it all depends on you.” Above my office door hangs my mentor, Fred Smith’s insight: “God won’t do for you what you must do. And He won’t let you do what only He can do.”

More significantly, personal assurance generates *prayerful dependence* on God’s thoughts, moves, and works on your behalf.

I teach students to answer three questions about prayer under providence:

***Must God answer?*** Absolutely no.

***Can God answer?*** Absolutely yes.

***Will God answer?*** We don't know ... but we will ask. "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much" (James 5:16 NASB). God enables prayer to accomplish His will. Since, in His wisdom, power, and goodness, God includes our prayers in his providential thinking, moving and working, our prayers bring about His will through conventional, interventional, contraventional, and even transventional ways.

God's very nature reveals itself as the confluence of total wisdom and knowledge, absolute power and authority, and faultless goodness and love, bringing a providential plan through concurrent means with active governance to the glory of the Godhead and the good of those who love God. This is the Christian God who always thinks, moves, and works for His glory, our eternal salvation, and the final restoration of the cosmos as originally intended.

Without surrendering His other attributes—holiness, justice, mercy, and so on—God plans and pursues us in awesome wisdom and knowledge, power and authority, goodness and love through our awful rebellion. When we finally respond in trust, He makes us think we chose Him! He's done this for you, will do so for Israel, who currently says no, and for Gentiles who are saying yes. One day, in the best actual world to come, every eye will see Him, every knee will bow, and every mouth will

acknowledge the brilliance of His providence, concurrence, and governance.

To understand my limitations in grasping these truths, I began writing this article in the dark, without overhead lights. The glow from my computer screen was sufficient to see what I was writing, but not enough to brighten this room. Soon, I would turn on the bright lights in my office, suitable for video recording, with music as loud as possible to fill the room with light and sound.

Similarly, all we see now are the outlines of God's providence, the dim outer limits of His wise governance—like writing by the glow of a computer screen in a dark room as human responsibility. We notice the hemlines, the lower edges of His powerful control, and commit to the bottom line of His glory as the core and outcome of His providence, with a top line of His sovereignty until we enter heaven. Then the full lights will come on, and we'll see clearly what we could only glimpse in shadows, exclaiming, "Oh, wow!" "I see!" and "Thank you!"

Join me in reading slowly, absorbing deeply, and claiming fully the apostle Paul's praise and adoration as he is floored by God's thoughts, moves, and works in Israel's history and human salvation:

***Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!***

***For who has known the mind of the Lord, Or who became His counselor?***

***Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again?***

***For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.***

(Romans 11:33–36 NASB)

I am quite certain eternity will run out of time (even as I have run out of space) before we run out of our "Oh, wows," "I sees," and "Thank yous" to the Lord Jesus Christ, our Sovereign Savior and Shepherd.





# RREACH

Ramesh Richard Evangelism and Church Health

17110 Dallas Parkway | Suite 230 | Dallas, TX 75248  
+1-972-528-6100 or +1-800-RREACH-World  
info@rreach.org | rreach.org | rameshrichard.com

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### How God Manages the World

by **Ramesh Richard**



#### **Ramesh Richard, PhD, ThD**



A theologian-evangelist, philosopher-expositor, educator, and author, Ramesh Richard holds a ThD from Dallas Theological Seminary and PhD from the University of Delhi. He serves as president of RREACH, a global proclamation ministry, and as Professor of Global Theological Engagement and Pastoral Ministries at Dallas Theological Seminary. Dr. Richard travels the world clarifying the message of the Bible to audiences from pre-Christian opinion leaders in professional settings to poor pastoral leaders in rural areas, from gatherings of a few to crowds of a hundred thousand. He has trained thousands of church leaders in more than 100 countries to preach, live, and think biblically.