

***The Hand of God (Finding His Care in All Circumstances)*** by Alistair Begg, Moody Publishers (Chicago, IL: 1999). (32 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

### **1. The Providence of God.**

“The providence of God is ‘that continued exercise of the divine energy whereby the creator preserves all his creatures, is operative in all that comes to pass in the world, and directs all things to their appointed end.’” (Berkhof) (p. 9)

### **2. God Purposed the Life of Joseph.**

“In modern day terms, Joseph came from a dysfunctional family. Indeed, we all came from a dysfunctional background because sin makes people dysfunctional. But when you take all the sins of a large number of selfish people and mix them together in a family, you have an entity badly out of alignment with wheels turning in different directions.

“We can summarize this background briefly. We need to remember that in the rough-and tumble of a less- than-perfect family life, God was preparing Joseph for the role He had planned for him. As a matter of fact, the only explanation for the life of Joseph and the role he played is found in the electing grace of God. There is no human reason whatsoever that Joseph should have emerged from the emotional and spiritual carnage of his family life to be the incredible man of God purposed that it should be so. ‘God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform. He plants His footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.’” (p. 18)

### **3. Trials for Our Improvement.**

“Our trials come, Augustine said, ‘to prove us and improve us.’” (p. 18)

### **4. What legacy are parents leaving?**

“What of us parents? What is the legacy we are leaving? What stories will our children tell? When they stand and gaze at our tombstone, what then? Be encouraged that out of the chaos of Joseph’s background came a man God used as a stirring example of His grace.” (p. 19)

### **5. Praying for Those of Whom You Are Jealous.**

“F.B. Meyer, a great British preacher earlier in this century, told how his fellow great preacher G. Campbell Morgan came to preach in the same location as Meyer. Gradually, people began drifting from Meyer’s congregation into Morgan’s.

“Meyer later wrote how envy and jealousy began to grip his soul, and how the only liberation he could find was to pray for Campbell Morgan and ask God to bless his ministry. Meyer prayed that God would bless Morgan’s ministry so much there wouldn’t be enough seats to hold all the people who wanted to hear him--and that they would come and listen to F.B. Meyer.” (p. 26-27)

## **6. Our Father Is with Us.**

“But Joseph was safe, because even though his earthly father stayed behind in Canaan, his heavenly Father came with him into Egypt. Sometimes the will of God is found on the back of a smelly camel going down to a far country.” (p. 42)

## **7. Joseph Knew God Was in Control.**

“Somehow, despite his extreme distress, Joseph must have been that God was still in control of his life. He was learning to say with the psalmist, ‘I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living’” (Psalm 27:13, niv).

## **8. Often God Uses Pain to Mold Us.**

“A.W. Tozer once said, ‘It is doubtful that God ever used anybody greatly without first hurting him deeply.’” (p. 44)

## **9. God’s Place is the Ideal Place.**

“There is no ideal place to serve God except the place in which He has set you down. There is no ideal job for you to hold, no ideal neighborhood in which to live, and no ideal church you can join.

“There are good jobs, good neighborhoods, and good churches, but no ideal ones. People who search for ideal circumstances forget that all that is ideal and perfect is saved for heaven. They launch forth on a journey destined to end in disappointment.” (p. 48)

## **10. God protects Us in Circumstances.**

“Joseph wasn’t protected from the circumstances but in the circumstances. We often ask God to remove the problem from us or remove us from the problem. But most of the time what God does with His children is change their attitude toward the circumstances in which they find themselves.

“God could have done things differently in Joseph’s life. But God purposed that

‘through many dangers, toils, and snares’ He would fashion His servant for noble service and erase the blemishes in his character, even as He is doing with us.” (p. 49)

### **11. The Lord Never Forsakes Those Who Seek Him.**

“The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you” (Psalm 9:9-10, niv). and, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1, niv). (p. 50)

### **12. God Enables Us to Do His Will.**

“There is no command in the Word of God to which we have to answer, ‘But I can’t.’ God never calls us to an action that He does not enable us to compete. If God says to get rid of something, we can be certain that He will supply the power of the Spirit that will enable us to do the job.

“Make no mistake. When we wallow in bitterness, resentment, and self-pity, we make a prison for ourselves. We cannot lay blame at God’s feet.” (p. 52)

### **13. It’s Character That Counts.**

“It isn’t the style or the stuff in the coat, nor is it the length of the tailor’s bill. It’s the stuff in the chap inside of the coat that counts for good or ill.” (p. 54)

### **14. Work Hard, then Success.**

“A fable is told of two grasshoppers that were thrown into a pail of milk. The first grasshopper began immediately to sulk and give up, and he drowned in the milk.

“But the second grasshopper began to kick like crazy and work hard at getting out of the pail. In the process, he churned the milk into butter--and then walked out of the pail on top of that block of butter.” (p. 54)

### **15. Bad Circumstances Are Used by God.**

“John Bunyan spent twelve years in a jail in Bedford, England. He was in jail because he refused to preach according to the rules of the day. He wasn’t a Church of England clergyman, but he loved to preach.

“So the authorities told him, ‘Bunyan, cut it out or we’ll put you in jail.’

“Bunyan answered, ‘I can’t cut it out. I have to preach.’ And he preached everywhere he went. So they arrested and jailed John Bunyan, and he languished in his cell for twelve years.

“Now, those were rotten circumstances. But within a short time, we are told, there was music coming from Bunyan’s cell. He had taken one of the legs of his three-legged stool to carve flute.

“John Bunyan did something else in his cell. He wrote *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, a book that has become *the* classic after the Bible in the history of Christianity. Millions have been impacted by a work written in the worst of circumstances by a forgotten prisoner in seventeenth-century England.” (p. 55)

## **16. The Elixir.**

“The sixteenth century writer George Herbert composed the poem, ‘The Elixir,’ which deals with this subject so well that it became a hymn in Great Britain.

“Teach me, my God and  
King, In all things thee  
to see,  
And what I do in  
anything To do it as  
for Thee.

A servant with this  
clause Makes  
drudgery divine;  
Who sweeps a room as for Thy  
laws, Makes that and the  
action fine.” (p. 56)

## **17. God Works for Our Good and His Glory.**

“A poet penned these well-known words, ‘I walked a mile with pleasure and she chattered all the way, but left me none the wiser for all she had to say. I walked a mile with sorrow and ne’er a word said she, but oh the things I learned from her, when sorrow walked with me.’

“It’s not that we need to go out and seek sorrowful circumstances so that God can bless us. But when such circumstances come our way, we do well to recognize that

in all the pain of human experience and relationships, God is working for our good and His glory, according to the promise of His word: ‘We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose’ (Romans 8:28, niv). (p. 59)

## **18. Temptation Demands the Right Response.**

a. “Deal with temptation *immediately*. Don’t wait until the little stream becomes a raging river that will sweep you away. The moment we become conscious of any sinful thought or desire, we need to ask God to help us reject the suggestion and dismiss it.

b. “Deal with temptation *realistically*. God told Cain, ‘Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you’ (Genesis 4:7, niv). If there is a lion on the other side of the door waiting to pounce on you, you’d better get realistic about the situation before you blithely open the door. Jesus said to His disciples ‘Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation’ (Matthew 26:41, niv).

c. “Deal with temptation *ruthlessly*. I would remind you here of Jesus’ graphic metaphors in dealing with sin (Mark 9:43-48). In the Falkland’s War, Margaret Thatcher ordered the bombing of the British runway in Port Stanley so as to prevent enemy aircraft from landing. That serves as a useful analogy.

d.”Deal with temptation *consistently*. Establish patterns of resistance.

e. “Deal with temptation *confidently*. The promise of 1 Corinthians 10:13 gives us an unshakable confidence in facing temptation because its terms are absolute. (p. 72-73)

## **19. Don’t Be Surprised by Suffering.**

“We will experience seasons in our lives when we will find ourselves on the receiving end of accusations, slander, and other forms of mistreatment. This hard to take when it is undeserved. It comes like a hard slap in the face that stuns and surprises us.

“But, it indeed, trouble in the form of unjust suffering is sure to come our way-- and Jesus says it will (John 16:33)--then we needn’t be taken aback by it. Instead we need to know who to handle it when it comes.

“The first thing we need to understand is that suffering is not the unusual exception for the Christian. Therefore, we should not be surprised when we suffer unjustly.

“Peter writes to the church. ‘Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you’ (1 Peter 4:12,niv). Don’t be taken off guard by unjust suffering, Peter says, because that is the

way Jesus suffered. And when we suffer in the same way, we are actually participating in Jesus' sufferings (v.13)." (p. 90)

## **20. Following Christ Is Not a Walk In the Park.**

"How did we arrive at the conclusion that following Christ is a walk in the park? Where did we get the idea that serving Christ is a guarantee against trial and pain and persecution?"

"We didn't get it from Jesus. He guarantees just the opposite. 'In this world you will have trouble' (John 16:33). And in His own life, our Lord was the supreme example of a person who suffered unjustly.

"During the trial of Jesus, Pilate said repeatedly, 'I find no basis for a charge against him' (John 18:38, 19:4,6).

The Roman governor knew Jesus' enemies had delivered Him up out of jealousy, not because He had done anything wrong. Nevertheless, Pilate had Jesus cruelly flogged (19:1) and then turned Him over to be crucified.

"With Jesus' experience in mind, consider the question Peter asks, 'How is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God' (I Peter 2:20, niv). (p. 91)

## **21. Orthodox Christianity Will Not be Tolerated.**

"Now I may be wrong, and in one sense I pray that I am. But as we look toward the horizon, there is every indication that orthodox Christianity, with its insistence on the sufficiency and authority of Scripture and the exclusivity of Christ, will not be tolerated, but instead will be vehemently opposed in the next millennium.

"That's because pluralists can only tolerate other pluralists. Pluralists are mercilessly intolerant toward those who refuse to subscribe to their views.

"When we declare that Jesus--and Jesus alone--is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, when people know clearly where we stand, we will become a thorn in the side of a pluralistic, pantheistic world. So again, don't be surprised when you suffer for being a Christian." (p. 93-94)

## **22. Do Right.**

"F.B. Meyer says, 'Do right because it is right to do right. And when you determine to do right because it is right to do right, then when you're misunderstood, ill-treated, when you're the victim of unjust suffering, you won't swerve, you won't sit down, you won't

whine, and you won't despair.'" (p. 94)

### **23. Consider What Jesus Endured.**

"Hebrews 12:3 is a great antidote for those who feel like quitting. After urging us to fix our eyes on Jesus, the writer says, 'Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will grow weary and lose heart.'

"Having a hard time? Feeling like throwing in the towel, giving up, losing heart? Consider what Jesus endured. After all, 'in your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood' (Hebrews 12:4, niv) the way Jesus did. You haven't died yet, the writer says. So don't give up." (p. 95)

### **24. Expressing Gratitude.**

"I once read about a seminary professor who went into a depression so deep that he didn't care about anyone or anything. Everything seemed hopeless.

"One day a visiting friend urged him to think of people who had been of major help to him, and from that list to select one person to whom to write a letter expressing his gratitude.

"The man thought about it for some time, and into his mind's eye came the face of a school teacher he had had when he was a small boy. This teacher had instilled in him a love of literature, and he was grateful. So he decided to write her a letter telling her how she had inspired him.

'He received a reply in the shaky handwriting of an elderly woman. the note said, 'Dear William, when I read your letter I was blinded with tears, for I remember you as a little fellow in my class. You warmed my old heart. I taught school for fifty years. Your is the first letter of thanks I have received from a student, and I shall cherish it until I die.'

"With that letter, a sliver of light came into the dungeon of this professor's life. He was encouraged to write another thank-you note to a significant person in his life, and then another and another until he had written five hundred notes of gratitude and was no longer in the depression." (p.98)

### **25. Things Written in Past Are to Teach Us.**

"Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4, niv).

## **26. Gifts Come from God, Not Ourselves.**

“All of us as believers have been given spiritual gifts by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7-11). Some people’s gifts are more evident and more abundant than the gifts of others--but since all of us are gifted by God’s hand, we better not call too much attention to ourselves. For in doing so, we may obscure the grace of God.” (p. 102)

## **27. Seeing the Big Picture.**

“Joseph was learning to live a God-focused life in the dungeon. Even in the darkness, he was able to see his life from a perspective bigger than his immediate surroundings.

“Do you want to live with a self-centered focus? Be prepared for major disappointment. Do you want to live with a circumstance-centered focus? Be prepared for endless frustration. The only way to live is joyfully with a God-centered focus. That’s when you will be looking in the right direction.” (p. 104)

## **28. False Worldviews.**

People don’t know how to view themselves because our culture, and particularly the university establishment, has fed them a confusing array of false worldviews.

The result is that many people are like the guy who jumped off the top of a thirty-five-story building. As he passed the twentieth floor, somebody heard him shout, ‘So far, so good.’” (p. 104)

## **29. Man Does Not Have Clear Knowledge of Himself.**

“John Calvin figured this out more than four hundred years ago. ‘Man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself. He can never know who he is unless he has first looked upon God’s face and then descends from contemplating Him to scrutinizing himself.’” (p. 104)

## **30. God Can Do What He likes.**

“George Lawson points out. ‘Let us remember that divine providence is under no obligation to be equally kind to us all. And that prosperity and adversity, life and death, are distributed to me by One who has a right to do what He will with His own.’ In other words, God is God, and He can do what He likes.” (p. 105)



### **31. Tell the Truth No Matter What.**

“The lesson from the dungeon is that if you are going to be a servant of God, you are going to have to tell the truth--the good, the bad, and the ugly--no matter what. And you're going to have to live with the blast furnace of criticism and opposition.

“Witness the integrity of Joseph in this matter. Some people must have looked at him years later and said, ‘He became the prime minister of Egypt overnight.’

“No, he didn't. God was fashioning Joseph for leadership in the crucible of suffering, hammering out his convictions on the anvil of life. And one thing God was teaching Joseph was this: ‘Joseph tell the truth. Do what is right, because it is always right to do right.’ Joseph learned the lesson, and he stood out in the midst of malaise around him.

“Just before his death, Paul told his spiritual son and disciple, Timothy, ‘Preach the Word ... For the time will come when men will not put up sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear’ (2 Timothy 4:2-3, niv). Calvin says, ‘All love to be flattered. Hence the majority of teachers, in desiring to yield to the corrupt wishes of the world, adulterate the Word of God.

“Joseph told the truth in the dungeon even when it was hard. What a shame that our nation is led for the most part not by people of this commitment, but by politicians who wait to see what popular sentiment is at the moment, and then follow it.

“Somebody has to stand up and tell the truth. If God's people will not be strong and do exploits, then who shall?” (p. 106)

### **32. The Purposes of Providence.**

“People often wonder why, if God is sovereign and in control of everything. He allows so much sin in the world.

“The answer from the Scripture is, for His own glory. God knows what He is doing. He has dealt with sin at the Cross, and He is about to deal with sin when He banishes the Evil One into hell forever.

“But, in the meantime, sin serves God's purposes. And since He is God, let us not raise our voices in protest. Lawson says, ‘God not only permits sin, but He makes use of it. No sinner can do any evil that God has not intended to use for the advancement of His own glory.’ We see this truth brilliantly illustrated in the case of Joseph.

“Although God overrules human sin, no one can use providence as a cloak or an excuse for wickedness. John Calvin writes:

I grant [that] thieves and murderers and other evildoers are the instruments of divine providence. And the Lord himself uses these to carry out the judgments that He has determined with Himself. Yet I deny that they can derive from this any excuse for their evil deeds. Why? Will they either involve God in the same iniquity with themselves? Or will they cloak their own depravity with His Justice? They can do neither. In their own conscience they are so convicted as to be unable to clear themselves. In themselves they so discover all evil, but in Him only the lawful use of their evil intent as to preclude the charge against God. Well and good, for He works through them. (p. 154-155).