

*First Presbyterian Church of Hanford*

# “DIVINE CHOREOGRAPHY”

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**TEXT: PHILIPPIANS 1:12-18** *ESV*

In the book of Philippians, we encounter a surprising version of the Apostle Paul. The driven missionary, the indefatigable church planter, the tireless theologian—finally relaxed. Paul, it seems, only ever truly slows down when he is in jail.

In Philippians, Paul is warm, affectionate, even a bit gushy. It is among his most personal letters. He writes not as a distant authority but as a beloved pastor to a beloved congregation.

Paul is imprisoned—perhaps in Rome—writing to the Christians at Philippi. Though he possesses certain rights as a Roman citizen, including the ability to write letters, death nonetheless hangs over his head. He knows execution could come at any moment. And yet, remarkably, there is no panic in his words, no bitterness, no self-pity. There is joy.

## UNFLAPPABLE

We often heroize Paul, and rightly so—but it is worth remembering how hard his life actually became. Once a rising star among the Pharisees, respected and admired, moving upward through the ranks of Jerusalem’s religious elite, Paul is now a pariah.

Following Jesus meant the destruction of his status and reputation. He is disgraced in the public eye—rejected by many of his fellow Jews, misunderstood and maligned by Gentiles. His former life of honor has been replaced by chains, suspicion, and suffering.

And yet, in our text, Paul shows no trace of resentment. Instead, he reflects calmly on the fact that he has both supporters and opponents. To some, he is an example of faithfulness; to others, a cautionary tale. But Paul brushes past the personal details. What matters to him is not how he is perceived, but that Christ is preached.

If the gospel advances, Paul rejoices—even if his own circumstances worsen. He is utterly *unflappable*.

## THE DANCE OF PROVIDENCE

Paul’s posture can be summed up simply: It’s all good.

Even when contemplating his own life or death, Paul says, in effect, It’s all good. Not because suffering is pleasant or prison is desirable, but because God is trustworthy.

Paul rests in the perfect providence of God.

He uses a word to describe the Spirit’s work that evokes choreography—a carefully ordered movement, a kind of divine dance. The world is not random. Reality is not chaotic. There are no coincidences in the ultimate sense, because God is providentially at work.

God remains in charge, directing history not as a machine operator but as a master choreographer.

Of course, this raises the unavoidable question: if God’s providence is perfect, why do bad things happen? Why evil? Why suffering?

I once heard of a woman dying in a Catholic hospital, battling despair as her life slipped away. In her room hung a crucifix. As she gazed upon Christ on the cross, her thinking slowly shifted—from “Why me?” to “Why Him?”

The cross does not give us an explanation for suffering. It gives us something better: assurance. In God’s own voice, the cross tells us that suffering is not meaningless, that pain is not wasted, that evil does not get the final word.

We do not get explanations. We get something deeper—we get trust.

God is in charge. And God can be trusted.

## CURING MISTER MAGOO

There are, broadly speaking, two kinds of people in the world.

The first kind never sees coincidences at all—or rather, they see them but never recognize them for what they are. Think of the cartoon character Mister Magoo: blind as a bat, wandering through catastrophe after catastrophe, narrowly missing disaster every step of the way. It's almost painful to watch.

But Mister Magoo chalks it all up to luck.

Much of the world lives this way. God is constantly at work, preserving, guiding, rescuing—and it is entirely taken for granted. Providence is invisible to those who refuse to see.

The second kind of person sees the very same events and calls them what they are—not luck, but providence. The handiwork of a good and loving Lord.

This kind of person:

- Begins each day by remembering God's acts in history
- Gives praise and thanks for God's ongoing provision
- Acknowledges God's complete lordship
- Asks boldly for needs and desires, always concluding, "Thy will be done"
- Watches expectantly for God's handiwork throughout the day

Such a life becomes saturated with gratitude. And gratitude, lived deeply, is joy.

## TRUST OVER BELIEVING

Most of the world lives like Mister Magoo. There is little trust in God, and many prefer to trust their blind eyes instead.

This is where an important distinction matters: belief is not the same as trust. Belief is largely a function of the mind. Beliefs can change with study, experience, or new information. Trust, however, involves the whole self. It requires commitment.

Faith, properly understood, is not merely believing that God exists—it is trusting in God.

The Magoos of the world can stand surrounded by divine activity and never recognize it.

## COINCIDENCE?

You may have heard the story of a seminary student at the Princeton train station. A man waiting for the train stepped backward off the platform, his foot lodged beneath the rail. A train was approaching, horns blaring. In terror, the man cried out, "God! Oh God! Please help me!"

The seminary student jumped down, freed his foot, and pushed him back onto the platform just as the train roared past.

Later, after exchanging numbers, the student asked the man, "Where is God in this for you now?"

After a pause, the man replied, "Well... that was just emotional talk. I was panicking."

Even when something looks very much like a miracle, some will still say, "It was just a coincidence."

I once heard an elder in Texas say, "The more I pray, the more coincidences happen."

## JOINING THE DANCE

The alternative to terminal Magooism is to live fully awake—to open our eyes to what God has done, is doing, and will yet do among us.

There is nothing quite like living each day in the awareness of God's perfect providence and becoming more attentive to God's guiding hand.

It really is like a dance. We can move with the music, or we can ignore it. We can resist it blindly, or we can trust it.

Paul chose trust. And so he became unflappable. "It's all good"—not in a shallow sense, but in the deepest possible way.

So jump in with both feet. Get into the flow of the music.

Dance. Commit. Trust. †