

# Robinson Crusoe's attitude towards divine providence



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In Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, appropriately titled after its main character, young Robinson is a middle-class man in search of a career. Though pressed by his family to study Law, Robinson yearns for oceanic adventure, longing to escape to a life at sea. Against the will of his father, his subsequent rebellion and decision to board a merchant vessel further damages his already fragile and undeveloped view of God, which withers completely as he joins company with godless sailors. Crusoe's assessment of Providence's sunshine is foggy at best, and he seems to label God's justice as merciless, rather than merciful and forgiving. This fledgling faith is nurtured as life experience unfolds, especially during his island experience. Robinson Crusoe journeys in his attitude toward Divine Providence from a rebellion against what he perceives as a disinterested authority early on, to an initial repentance and conversion through the vision-dream, and finally, to an active and mature faith in a loving God, Who protects and guides all things, by the end of his stay on the island. As Crusoe's adventures began to unfurl, his outlook on God remained sheepish, and he retained a certain reluctance to accept the all-wise plan which God held for each and every one of his flock. Crusoe's infant devotion is revealed as, on his maiden voyage, the ship nearly founders, and he prays to God for the first time from a place of distress. As his first passage involves a near-death experience, he concludes that it must be his heavenly Father's will that he obey his earthly father's will. Nevertheless, the ocean beckons, and his view of God as a chastising power fails to develop for several years. Crusoe's hazardous life is filled with risk, and reward and retribution travel hand-in-hand. Just as things seem to be going perfectly, Robinson finds himself the sole survivor of a shipwreck, and, beaten by the waves, he is washed ashore an exotic island.

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Despite his initial thankfulness for his salvation, loneliness overwhelms him and he is filled with ingratitude at his misfortune. During this time Crusoe views himself as the author of his own miseries, believing his misadventures to be the merchandise of his past misbehaviors, and would oftentimes sit and weep as he pondered “ why Providence should thus completely ruin its creatures and render them so absolutely miserable.” Just as Crusoe was shipwrecked physically, it seems he was also shipwrecked spiritually, searching for a trustworthy island whilst struggling for survival in waves of doubt. Various events lead the shipwrecked swashbuckler to take on a new attitude towards Providence, and he begins to appreciate his deliverance onto the island. In a dream he realizes his need for repentance, and he wakes in tears as he realizes his ingratitude. Robinson recognizes the “ stupidity of soul” (p. 81) with which he has been living, and his prayers turn from ungracious to thankful. His thoughts of self-pity are now followed by thoughts of self-rebuke, and the Bible begins to affect him profoundly. Shameful of his past ways, Crusoe launches into vigorous reading of the New Testament. Joined by a new companion, Friday, Crusoe is finally again in the company of his own kind, and he redevelops his understanding of humans as he observes Friday's humble servitude. The arrival of mutineers and their ousted captain to the island further challenge Crusoe and, as he works with the captain to reclaim the ship, his eyes are fully opened to the completeness of God's plan for him. Believing himself to be playing a significant part in work of Providence, Robinson takes on a poise and governance which reflect the maturity of the faith he has come to understand. His willingness to come to the aid of others is quick and gracious as he comprehends the willingness of God to come to his own aid and for the

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first time he truly places the Will of Providence at the center of his life.

Crusoe's approach to God matures throughout his life as he mutinies against the desires of his loved ones, is brought to repentance by what he views as a Divine intervention, and mellows into a lively and developed faith in a loving God who defends and attends to all things. The marooned mariner who arrived to the island is now a jubilant instrument in the work of Providence, and appreciatively indebted to the Savior he has come to know. The faith which began with fear now rests in exultation, and continues to remain as the centerpiece in the thoughts and decisions of the liberated castaway.

Robinson Crusoe follows a seemingly perpetual design of sinning, disregarding God's forewarnings, hardening his heart to God, repenting as a result of God's favor and forgiveness, and undergoing a soul-wrenching conversion.