

OHIO BRIGADE CAMP

BIBLE X | LEADER'S RESOURCE GUIDE

DAY 5 — The Dominion of Providence

John Witherspoon | 1776

Scripture Focus	Psalm 76:10 Romans 8:28 Matthew 5:14–16
Sermon	The Dominion of Providence — John Witherspoon (1776)
Theme	God Is Sovereign — Even the Wrath of Man Praises Him
Session Length	45–60 min (adjust questions as needed)
Audience	Young men, Ohio Brigade Camp

SERMON BACKGROUND — KNOW THIS BEFORE YOU LEAD

John Witherspoon preached this sermon on May 17, 1776 — seven weeks before the signing of the Declaration of Independence. He was a Scottish Presbyterian minister, the president of Princeton University, and the only active clergyman to sign the Declaration.

The sermon text was Psalm 76:10 — "Surely the wrath of man shall praise you; the remnant of wrath you will put on like a belt." Witherspoon's message: even the worst actions of men — oppression, cruelty, injustice — are ultimately under God's sovereign control. Nothing happens outside His purpose. Even the fury of man praises Him.

This was not passive fatalism. Witherspoon called the colonists to action — but grounded that action in trust. God is in control. Therefore, act with courage. Trust in God, not in your own strength. Pursue justice, purity of purpose, and unity — and leave the outcome to God.

Day 5 brings the week full circle. Winthrop gave the charge (Day 1). Edwards gave the diagnosis (Day 2). Whitefield gave the cure (Day 3). Mayhew gave the framework for action (Day 4). Witherspoon gives the foundation for endurance: God is sovereign. Even when it looks like evil is winning — He is not surprised.

THE THREE BIG IDEAS — WITHERSPOON'S FRAMEWORK

1. God Is Sovereign Over All Human Events — Including the Worst Ones

Witherspoon's central claim: the wrath of man praises God. Not because evil is good, but because God is greater than evil. He uses human fury and oppression as instruments in His larger plan. No tyrant, no enemy, no injustice operates outside His sovereign purpose. The cross is the ultimate proof: the worst act in human history became the greatest act of salvation.

- Key text: Psalm 76:10 — The wrath of man shall praise God.
- Key text: Romans 8:28 — All things work together for good.
- Key text: Genesis 50:20 (Joseph) — What man meant for evil, God meant for good.

2. Suffering Produces Character When Grounded in Trust

Witherspoon does not promise comfort — he promises purpose. Suffering is not evidence that God has abandoned you. It is evidence that He is at work. The Founders risked everything. The martyrs of the Church lost everything. And through it, something was forged that comfort could never produce.

- Key text: Romans 5:3–5 — Suffering produces endurance, character, and hope.
- Key text: James 1:1–4 — The testing of your faith produces steadfastness.
- Key text: Psalm 23:1–6 — Even through the valley of the shadow of death.

3. The Call to Action Is Grounded in a Humble Heart

Witherspoon's practical directives for the colonists: seek personal salvation, promote public virtue, practice industry and frugality. The revolution required men of character, not just men of courage. The same is true today. A city on a hill is built by men who have first dealt honestly with their own hearts.

- Key text: Jeremiah 17:9–10 — The heart is deceitful above all things.
- Key text: Romans 6:23 — The wages of sin are death; the gift of God is eternal life.
- Key text: Matthew 5:14–16 — Let your light shine.

LEADER COACHING NOTES

This Is the Capstone — Bring the Week Together

Before you open the Day 5 questions, take 5 minutes to walk back through the week: Winthrop's charge (we are watched), Edwards's diagnosis (we are sinners), Whitefield's cure (new creation), Mayhew's framework (righteous action under God), and now Witherspoon's foundation (God is sovereign). Ask: What has shifted for you this week?

The "Why Does Evil Win?" Question Is Real

Don't dismiss it. These boys live in a world where bad things happen to good people, where injustice often goes unpunished, and where the powerful frequently crush the weak. Witherspoon is not offering a tidy explanation — he is offering a posture: God sees, God rules, and God is not done. Hold that tension honestly.

The Joseph Story Is Powerful Here

Genesis 50:20 is Witherspoon's argument in miniature. Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, imprisoned unjustly, and forgotten. And God was using every bit of it. The suffering was real. The injustice was real. And so was the sovereign hand of God that turned it into salvation for nations. Make that concrete for them.

The Closing Is a Commission, Not a Conclusion

This is the last day of Bible X. End it with weight and hope. They are being sent out. Winthrop's city on a hill is not a memory — it is a calling. Each of them carries the torch. What are they going to do with it?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS — WITH LEADER GUIDANCE

Opening: Psalm 76:10

Witherspoon says even the wrath of man praises God. What does that mean? Can you think of an example — from history or your own life — where something that seemed like pure evil turned out to serve a larger purpose?

Leader note: The cross is the answer to this question. Bring them there if they do not go on their own.

Romans 8:28 / Genesis 50:20

Joseph's brothers meant to destroy him. God meant it for salvation. Does believing that God can use evil for good make the evil acceptable? How do you hold those two things at the same time?

Leader note: This is a serious theological question — don't flatten it. God does not cause evil, but He governs it. Joseph's brothers were still guilty. And God was still at work.

Luke 23:32–38 / Acts 2:22–24

Jesus asked God to forgive the people killing Him. Then God raised Him from the dead. How does that shape the way you respond to injustice and suffering?

Leader note: The resurrection is the ultimate answer to the problem of evil and suffering. Press them to connect that to their actual experience right now.

Romans 5:3–5 / James 1:1–4

Paul says suffering produces endurance, which produces character, which produces hope. Has anything hard in your life actually produced something good? What would it take to trust that the hard things happening right now are doing the same work?

Leader note: Make space for silence. Some boys are carrying real pain. Do not rush to comfort. Sit in the question.

Closing: Matthew 5:14–16

Winthrop said a city on a hill cannot be hidden. You have been at camp this week. You have heard from five preachers who helped shape a nation. What are you going to carry home? What light are you going to shine?

Leader note: This is the commissioning question. Give it the weight it deserves. You may want to close in a time of prayer rather than discussion — let the week speak.

CLOSING CHALLENGE — SEND THEM WITH SOMETHING

"Witherspoon signed the Declaration knowing it might cost him his life. It did cost him everything — his health, his son, his estate. He did it because he believed God was sovereign and the cause was just. He did it because the wrath of man cannot outlast the purposes of God. You are not being asked to sign a declaration today. You are being asked to go home and be the man this week has been building. Light your torch. Don't hide it. The world needs a city on a hill."

Final assignment — carry this one home:

- Name one person in your life — at school, at home, in your neighborhood — who needs to see the light of Christ. This week, be intentional. Shine.

LEADER NOTES

Notes from this session:

Follow-up needed with:
