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FOR US

A Sermon Series Devotional Guide
By Rev. D. Derrick West

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“God provides the wind. Man must raise the sail.”

-- Saint Augustine of Hippo

When We Obey

Genesis 22:1-19

October 9, 2011

A Testimony About Obedience and Provision

“Derrick, I will give you this piece of bubble gum. But please don’t chew it and then put it in your sister’s hair!” My dad said those words in the car to me several decades ago. A few miles later our Oldsmobile was parked at a rest stop while my mom was surgically removing the bubble gum from my sister’s hair and my dad was having a father and son conference that didn’t end well on my end. I heard my father’s command, but I chose not to obey. I was a hearer of the word, but not a doer of the word.

God calls us to be not just hearers. He calls us to be doers. Want God to provide for you in your life? Be a doer of the word. Here is a testimony from a doer of the Word who has been at FBC Vero for quite a while:

“God’s guidance and provision most often come to me through His church and its people, especially this community called First Baptist Church. I grew up in this church and was baptized here when I was thirteen years old. You have been faithful in your ministry to and interest in me as a person. Judy and I met in this church and were married in this church. Our two sons and our daughter made confessions of faith in this church and were all married here. Through the years God has continually provided ministers, teachers, and a laity that form a community, diverse in many ways, but united in relationships and purpose. I am convinced that God desires relationship more than he desires perfection! God has graciously allowed me to serve within this relationship in various areas of this church in the fulfilling of its mission. Thanks be to God!” -- Mr. S. Hiram Henderson.

Did you notice the key word in the second to last sentence? It is the word “serve.” It denotes obedience. It is the idea of not only being a hearer

of the word, but also a doer. You see God's provision and our obedience to do what he says are linked together. Hiram Henderson would tell you that. Abraham would to. God provided for him because he obeyed.

Reflection Questions

1. Read Genesis 22:1-19.
2. In what ways did Abraham do what God told him to do? Was that easy for Abraham? Is doing what God says always easy for you?
3. In what ways did God provide for Abraham after he did what God said?
4. How has God provided for you in your life when you have done what he said?
5. How can you be more of a doer of the word?

When We Prioritize

2 Chronicles 1:8-12

October 16, 2011

A Testimony about Priorities and Provision

The *Titanic* was about to sink and she had made it safely to one of the few lifeboats. But she realized that she left something in the safe of her plush cabin that she had to have. She dashed to her room and went straight for the safe. Her hands were shaking as she turned the dial on it.

3...23...32. It opens. She throws the hard cash on the ground. Same with the diamond earrings. She then finds what she had risked her life for. The fruit from lunch that she had accidentally left in the safe where she stored her diamond earrings that she remembered while waiting to get on the lifeboat.

I've heard that story several times. To this day, I still wonder if she made it back to the boat. Life threatening situations often teach us about real priorities don't they? Listen to this testimony from a church member who had a very scary situation that caused her to reevaluate her spiritual priorities:

"If you ask me the question 'what has God provided in your life' I'll say -what hasn't he? Without a doubt my salvation through Jesus Christ was God's greatest provision in my life. But one of my favorite provisions came through a time of suffering. It was a personal storm that shook my foundation.

A few years ago I was diagnosed with a melanoma. It wasn't the superficial kind that they just say, ok now be careful in the sun. No, this was deep in the skin, the kind where, well... there's a chance this got into your system but there's no way of knowing for sure. And if you know anything about this type of cancer, well, there just isn't a good outlook once it spreads. And then I had a couple of doctors tell me, no, actually it's just an abnormal mole, nothing to worry about. So it pretty much left me just... uncertain. Paranoid. Every little pain seems like evidence that yep,

I'm going to die. This went on for about a year and I fell into a dark depression.

I had come to the end of myself. I couldn't do it on my own. I had to put my life, my future, and my family, everything in His hands. And then something changed. And it was by far the greatest shift in my life. I learned what it meant to be in love with my Creator. Not just love him, not go to him in trouble, not thank him for his blessings. But be IN LOVE with his very being. Absolutely head-over-heels in love. And suddenly it didn't matter too much what happened to me. The things of this world became so secondary. Suddenly I could see Him in everything. And I began to understand Grace and Love in new and amazing ways. He filled up every empty space in my life. He was enough- more than enough, like his love was just overflowing." -- Mrs. Pamela Schwartz

Every time I read that testimony. It brings tears to my eyes. It also reminds me that my priorities and God's provision are closely tied together. Jesus said it like this: "seek first the kingdom of heaven and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you." To be honest, I often want the provision without the priorities. But our heavenly father doesn't work like that. He wants our priorities to be centered on His kingdom AND THEN He will bless us more than we can ever imagine. Pamela Schwartz would tell you that. And King Solomon would to.

Reflection Questions

1. Read 2 Chronicles 1 and pay particular attention to verses 7-12.
2. Solomon could have asked God for anything. Wealth. Influence. Power. Wisdom. But he asked for none of the aforementioned. What did he ask for? What does that suggest about his priorities?
3. Solomon sought the Lord's kingdom above his own. What did God give him in return?
4. In your opinion, then, how do priorities and provision go together?
5. What is wrong with this priority: God I will give you control of my finances and my life *if* you bless me in my business endeavor? Will God provide for a person with such a priority? Why or why not?

When We Need

2 Kings 4:1-7

October 23, 2011

A Needy Testimonial

He really needed the medication. Very badly. A lion had already torn off his shoulder and he had lost his wife to disease. And now an illness threatened to extinguish his life. So he got down on his knees and prayed: "Lord, you promised me you would be with me. I'm doing what you've asked me to do. I need that medication." Then a knock came on the door. He opened it. "You are Mr. Livingston, I presume? My name is Henry M. Stanley. Newspapers back home have sent me here to Africa to do a story on your life. But first I have some medication for you."

If you were to ask David Livingston if God provides, he would tell you yes and point you to more stories like the one I just referenced in his biography *Livingston of Africa*. But God doesn't just provide for missionaries when they have needs. He provides for ordinary folks like you and me. In fact, listen to this amazing testimony of God providing for the needs of one of our church members:

"God provided me another point of view and an opportunity to better reflect who He is, when I discovered that I was adopted. Tony and I were preparing for an overseas assignment and passports were needed. With passports come birth certificates. All of a sudden I was confronted with a truth that I had suspected for a long time. But the best part was finding out the circumstances surrounding my birth. Unwed at the time, my mother was given the option of aborting me, or giving me up for adoption. She refused both. For years, I had been on the fence about the abortion issue. Well, I'm here to tell you, I came down off that fence pretty fast and I am standing firmly on the side of life.

In 2008, I needed Him. I received a new and/or slightly used liver during transplant surgery. I was very sick. Slowly wasting away. I only

waited for a week on the transplant list. I went through a very rough time the following six weeks but I am here today...My goal at this time is to remain firmly attached to the One who saves, bring glory to His name, and share that with as many people as I can along the way. Praise God" -- Mrs. Sharon Young

What a great story about God's provision! You see there are times in our lives when we have to cry out to God and ask him to provide, much like David and Sharon. We need God's prophetic voice to speak truth into our souls and provide for a real and urgent need. Their stories remind me of a similar story in the Bible about God providing for a widow who had an urgent need.

Reflection Questions

1. Read 2 Kings 4:1-7
2. What crisis is the widow facing in which she desperately needed God to provide for her?
3. What does Elisha the prophet ask her to do?
4. How did God provide for her?
5. Make a mental note of the following in the passage: 1) what the widow needed (2) what God provided. What does this suggest about his love for you?
6. What areas of your life do you have a desperate need for God to work, act and provide? Voice those areas of need to him right now.

Where He Guides

Acts 8:26-40

October 30, 2011

A Testimony About Guidance and Provision

The year was 2008. The month was April. I was about to have a telephone conference call with a Search Committee at a church called First Baptist of Vero Beach. My wife and I had been praying for a solid year for God to lead, guide and direct us. And just before the conference call, I got on my knees and prayed to the Lord: "if this is where you want me to be, then make it very clear to me during this telephone conversation."

The first part of the conversation was fairly routine. "Where are you from?" "Spartanburg, SC." How is your infant son? "He is doing great, a chip off the old block." Then it happened. God made his will very clear to me. Boom! Bam! "Here is where I am leading you, Derrick."

One of the Search Committee members asked me a question I really wasn't expecting. It was a question about an obscure book that probably 10 people on the Atlantic Coast have ever read. "Derrick, I just have one question for you," said the voice on the other end of the receiver. Have you ever read Roger Beckwith's *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church*? To which I responded, "of all the books I have read during my graduate studies, that one is my favorite." I then proceeded to give the Search Committee a dissertation on the thesis of the book.

An obscure book that few people have read or probably even know about. Two of them are having a conversation about it. One goes to FBC Vero Beach, the other trying to discern if God is leading him there. It was not a coincidence. I knew at that point where God was leading me. The Search Committee might not have at that point. But I did.

As I write this three years later, I can honestly testify to you that where he guides, he will provide. My wife was 8 months pregnant when we moved to Vero Beach. But God provided excellent medical care to oversee

the birth of my daughter. Our house in Georgia still has not sold. But were able to rent it out to a pastor and his wife who really needed it *just last week*. God always provides where he guides. That has been the case with me. And that was the case with an apostle in the Book of Acts named Philip.

Reflection Questions

1. Read Acts 8:26-40
2. Why did God guide Philip down the desert road that stretched from Jerusalem to Gaza? Do you think God had equipped Philip for this task long before he ever met the Ethiopian eunuch?
3. How did God provide for the Ethiopian eunuch?
4. Philip was willing to be guided by God. God provided him with a divine encounter. The divine encounter resulted in the salvation and baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch. What does this story suggest about the influence you can have on people's lives should you choose to let God guide you?
5. In what ways has he guided and provided for you in the past?
6. In what ways do you think he wants to guide you in the future? Listen to me. Yield to him. Do what he says. He will provide for you every area that he guides you.

For His Purpose

John 6:1-14

November 6, 2011

A Thanks Be to God Testimony

The year was 1621. The scene was Plymouth, Massachusetts. It was harvest time, but the 102 pilgrims like you see on oatmeal boxes had a problem. They only had enough food to feed 51 pilgrims! But God was about to smile on them through a Native American Indian Tribe called the Wampanoag. They taught the pilgrims to fish and gave them seeds. As a result, the pilgrim's harvest grew more plentiful by the year. And in the 1660s that harvest festival evolved to what we now call *Thanksgiving*.

God provides for us *because* he loves us. We have already seen that in the last three lessons. But he also provides for us because he wants us to love him and thank him for helping us the way the Wampanoag Indians helped the first pilgrims. That is his purpose and that is why He provides for us.

I know one individual in our church who understands God's purpose in His provision and who lives every day of her life with an attitude of thanksgiving. Here is her story:

"God has provided everything for me since my conception. He gave me wonderful grandparents, parents, a sister and another sister and brother that I will meet in heaven one day. God is good!

He provided a Christian home and allowed me to ask Jesus into my heart when I was nine years old. When I was eleven years old I accidentally ran through a glass sliding door and almost lost my nose when the shards of glass fell on top of me. After several plastic surgery operations, I was able to become more social, but was severely introverted. God provided a loving and caring mother who worked through that time with me to give me the self-esteem that I needed by being thankful that I was a child of God. She told me that man looks on the outside, but God looks on the

inside and the most important thing was to be beautiful on the inside. God also provided a loving church family that embraced me and allowed me to be very involved during my middle and high school years. God is great!

Even through the tragic and unexpected loss of my husband two years ago, God has kept our family close and I thank him each day for my children and their love. He gave me angel friends in the darkest hours of my life to pray and uphold me. I know that everything comes from God and I am extremely blessed to be called His child. God is love!" -- Mrs. Pamela K. Bjorkman

What I gleaned from her story is that God provided a Christ-centered mother who nurtured her spiritually. As a result, God took an introverted person and made her into an extroverted person with a passion to help others the way her mother helped her. That is why she thanks him, even when on the receiving end of tragedy.

The pilgrims understood something about the nature of thanksgiving. The same is true for the Wampanoag Indians and Pamela Bjorkman. But unfortunately those on the receiving end of Jesus' miraculous *Thanksgiving* dinner, 5,000 to be exact, left the shore of the Sea of Galilee not understanding the *reason* and *purpose* that God provides.

Reflection Questions

1. Read John 6:1-15.
2. What is a miracle? Why does God perform them?
3. What elements of the story were truly miraculous?
4. The final two verses in this story end in what some biblical scholars call an anti-climax. It is when a good and selfless story ends on a selfish note. What is so selfish about the people's response to the miracle?
5. You see, what the text is getting at is this: if we view Jesus as a God that is only there to meet our needs over and over and over and over again, on our terms, we've missed the point. "Jesus, you are my king because I can ring the bell and you respond to my beckoning." But

Jesus wants you to see his purpose in the miraculous and the reason he provides for you. He provides for you because he wants you to see that He is your Lord, your Master and your God. He wants you to put your life in His hands and call him Lord, Master and God, not just ring a bell and treat him like he is a heavenly waiter. In what areas of your life to you need to make him master? Commit those things to him right now. That is his purpose and the reason he provides for you. He wants to be your master.

For Our Salvation

John 19:16-42

November 13, 2011

A Testimony of Salvation

God has provided for me in every facet of my life. He gave me a loving and very patient wife. He gave me two wonderful children. I am the pastor of a wonderful church filled with wonderful people, a church that has played an instrumental role in my personal and spiritual development. I have learned so many lessons here, so many, in fact, that I am convinced that God sent me here for my development as much as he sent me here to minister to all of you.

You see the truth is that God provides. Period. He always provides because of who he is. And you have to trust Him. Listen to the words of the wife of one of our ministers:

“When Lance was studying at seminary in Ft. Worth, we were living in student housing, without 2 nickels to rub together. Most of the students who were there at the time were in the same boat. Yet we saw and experienced, time after time, the incredible provision God makes for His children.

God provided us with jobs (Lance @ a hospital parking lot & me @ a working ranch) which, while they didn't make us wealthy, provided rent & usually grocery money. Sometimes, though, the money didn't stretch enough to pay for textbooks, shoes or clothing for our son, etc. We knew that God had called Lance into His service and wouldn't let us fail from lack of funds. After all, He owns it all. So we would raise up our specific needs to Him in prayer, and keep going.” – Mrs. Sherrie Fancher

What a great story! But Sherrie and Lance Fancher, Michael and Patty Carter, Tracy and Tatyana Claytor as well as Dawn and I would tell you that our salvation is our greatest provision.

Augustine of Hippo once prayed “you have made me for yourself, oh God, and my soul will never find rest until it finds its rest in thee.” My soul found rest on December 27, 1990 at a Youth Evangelism Conference at Furman University in Greenville, SC. That is when I understood God’s ultimate provision for me through the cross for the first time. Hiram Henderson is right. “The Way of the Cross,” certainly does “lead home.”

Reflection Questions

1. Read John 19:16-42
2. How does this statement demonstrate God’s love for you: “Jesus went to the cross in your place and on your behalf and absorbed his Father’s punishment for your sin?”
3. How do these statements go together: “God will provide” and “It is finished?”
4. What do you think is your greatest need in life? In light of this passage, what does God think your greatest need in life is?
5. I want to end this devotional guide with a challenge. My challenge to you is this: write out your testimony. Word by word. Sentence by sentence. Write a testimonial about how God has provided for you in your life, starting with your salvation. Then do me a favor. Put it in a safe place. And pick it up and read it when you begin to wonder in tough times whether God will provide for you in a time of need.