



WESTMINSTER  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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# Ignored Provision

Ed Sutter

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In my childhood bedroom while I was growing up there used to be a small painting of a mother duck being followed by three or four of her ducklings. The inscription on the painting said, “Be patient until your wings are grown.” All throughout my childhood, anytime I wanted a new freedom, or different responsibilities, or increased independence, my mother used to say to me, “Son, be patient until your wings are grown.”

I grew to hate that phrase. It meant that I wasn’t going to get what I wanted, that my mother didn’t think that I was ready for whatever I felt should come next. I think that for many of us there is a connection to the feelings of wanting something more.

We find ourselves asking questions like, “Is this all that there is? Is life just more of *this*?” We strive, and we work, and we hustle, and perhaps we even cut a few corners on our own morals and ethics. We do all of this with the hopes, with the plans that, “When I get around that next corner, then I’ll settle in.” We take the metaphor of seasons of life, the idea that this set of moments is temporary, and we use it as an excuse for shirked responsibility and questionable decisions. We tell ourselves things like:

“It’s just a busy month – it will be better in the summer.”

“If I ever want to have an impact, then I need to make my money while I can.”

“I’ll volunteer more when the kids are out of the house.”

We say this kind of thing all the time, and we live in communities and in a culture that teach us to believe these ideas as truth; and believe me, I fall into these traps about six days a week. So many of us are in a constant state of

desire and so very few of us would describe ourselves as truly content.

Now, I believe whole-heartedly that desire is, or can be a Godly motivator. We pray every week for God's Kingdom to come, and that His will would be done on earth as it is in Heaven – then we look around us and think, “Not even close.” We know that there *must* be something different, something more, something better out there for us.

We were meant for the Kingdom of God, and we are so far from home. So we do everything we can to anesthetize ourselves to the pain of that loss. We medicate ourselves with false senses of security, with safe neighborhoods, with high-performing school districts, with clubs, and honors and awards – all things that we think will make us feel safe, will make us feel like we belong, will make us feel like we have purpose. Belonging, security, purpose. All things that we lost when sin entered the world and we wandered from the Kingdom of God.

Yes, many of us feel lost, feel alone, feel worried. But God has not stopped providing. We just twist it, pervert it, or ignore it all together.

The concept of provision is unmistakable in the scriptures this morning. In Joshua, God had provided manna for the Israelites during their wanderings in the desert. The word manna literally translates to, “What is it?” It was a clear and obvious provision from God. But now, the manna has stopped, and the Israelites will eat from the produce of the land. Has God stopped providing? It sure doesn't seem like it. That may be true, but how long do you think it takes before the Israelites look to God and say, “What have you done for me lately? We earned this. We tilled this soil, we

planted that seed, we harvested that crop. We worked for this.”

How about the younger brother in the story of the prodigal son who was given an enormous inheritance? Again, a clear and obvious provision from his father the God-figure. But now the money has run out and he comes back to welcoming arms. Did the father ever stop providing? It sure doesn't seem like it. How long do you think until the younger brother argues with his older brother, “You don't know what I've been through, how hard it was out there! You had it easy!”

And the older brother. Life's been good. He's worked, and he's always had what he needed, honestly he's had more than he needed. He's been comfortable. And suddenly here comes the younger brother, and guess who gets jealous. Did the father ever stop providing? It sure doesn't seem like it. The older brother dives right in; we don't even need to wait for his response. Right off the bat he goes to his dad and says, “I never get what I want. What I have isn't enough.”

Do these sound familiar?

“What have you done for me lately – I earned all of this.”

“I understand life better than you – you always had it so easy.”

“I never get what I want and what I have isn't enough.”

But show me where God ever, even for a moment, stopped providing.

Doing the kind of ministry that I do, I have the pleasure of working with folks across almost the entire age spectrum. And here's what I've seen. Young people, so

much of life ahead, so much untapped desire, so much potential and energy and raw emotion. All of these wrap into a mindset that so often thinks, “What I have isn’t enough. I’ll never get what I want.”

Young adults, folks in their middle ages tend to fall somewhere in the “what have you done for me lately” camp. They’ve worked hard; degrees, careers, houses, cars...it’s easy to think, “I earned all of this.”

And adults of all ages, especially when they speak with younger generations can often think, “You have it so easy, you’ll never understand life the way that I do.” But God has never stopped providing. And even beyond that, the way that God provided for you is not better than the way that God has provided for someone else.

You see, we don’t just ignore what God has done in our lives, we can also discount what God is doing in the lives of others. We are so convinced that the things we call “good” in our own lives are God’s provision, that if those things are lacking in the lives of others we assume that God has somehow given them the short straw. But what God calls a blessing may be so very different from what you call a blessing.

The parking lot outside, and the neighborhoods all around the south hills are full of what we would call, “the fruits of our labor” but how do the fruits of our labor align with the fruits of the spirit? It’s hard to buy peace. You can’t live in 4000 square feet of joy. I can’t measure the horsepower of love or the dollar value of patience. God’s definition of blessing may be very different from ours.

So much of our seeking, our striving is pursuit of a feeling that has been lost with Eden. On our best days we know that God's Kingdom is here now, and that one day we will enjoy a whole and complete relationship with God. Until then, remember this. You were made for the Kingdom of God. This is not your home.

The same is true for all of us. Your provision from God is neither better than, nor worse than what God has given to another. So let us become a community that is grateful for what God gives. Not just to ourselves, but what God has given to all of his creation.





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