

## Provision

Each one of us comes here today with a number of needs in our lives. Think about it—if you were to make a list of the things you need right now, what would you include? It may be that your most pressing needs are the basics: money, a job, food, sleep, protection from danger, health, and of course, lots of coffee... For students about to begin a new year of school, your needs may be for: friends, good teachers & coaches, encouragement, guidance, a clear mind. For all of us, we may be in need of strength, forgiveness, renewal, patience, faith... In this mix of needs, which is the one that stands out the most for you? If you were to write one need in the front of your Bible today, which one would you choose? I encourage you to do that now—to write down one of your greatest needs in the front of your Bible.

Back in the time of Moses, 3500 years ago, the Israelite people had one pressing need, according to the book of Exodus, chapter 16. They were urgently in need of food. There they were, 600,000 men, along with all the women and children, in the middle of a desolate wilderness. No food anywhere. A month and a half ago, they had escaped from cruel slavery in Egypt. Moses had led them to the shore of the Red Sea, and there God had worked a mighty miracle, parting the waters of the sea, so that they could cross the seabed on dry land. Then, when the Egyptian Pharaoh and his armies had pursued them, God had caused the water to return, sweeping away their attackers. Now, safely on the other side, they were trekking through the wilderness toward the homeland God had promised them in Israel.

But they were desperately hungry, and the situation looked hopeless. They began to complain to Moses: “It would have been better to live in slavery in Egypt, than to die of starvation in the wilderness.”

What God did next is vitally important, because God acts in the same way toward us, when we’re in need. In the book of Exodus, God hears... God hears the cries of his people. This is so important that this detail is repeated 4 times (4 times!), in verses 7, 8, 9, and 12. And so we read: “The Lord said to Moses, ‘I have heard the murmuring of the people of Israel.’”

This is true today as well. God hears our cries, our prayers. God cares about our struggles in life, the things we lack, the things we need. God cares about each one of us—the young and the old and those in between. Those who are deeply religious and those who aren’t religious at all. Those who are popular and those who are outsiders. Those whose lives are full and those whose lives are empty. God cares and God listens.

That’s why prayer is so important. When we take time for prayer, we have the opportunity to tell God what’s on our minds, to put our needs into words. And God is always there to listen.

Then, there’s a second thing which God does. God provides. God provides abundantly. Do you remember what happened to the starving Hebrew people there in the wilderness? That evening, God caused the camp to be covered with quails, completely blanketed with quails—BBQ chicken for everyone... well close... roasted quail for everyone.

Then in the morning, God sent bread from heaven, a white flaky substance that the people called manna which covered the ground with the morning dew. It was nothing like the food the people had eaten in Egypt, it was something totally new to them, a wilderness food... but it

could be ground like grain, and boiled, and made into a kind of pancake [cf. Numbers 11:7-9].

And the people ate their fill and were satisfied.

Day after day, God provided manna for the people. Except on the Sabbath. The 7<sup>th</sup> day was a day of rest and the manna did not fall from heaven on the Sabbath. Instead, God provided twice as much on the day before the Sabbath—enough to last for both days. In this way, God continued to provide abundantly for his people— never again would they face hunger & starvation—throughout all the 40 years they journeyed through the wilderness, day after day, until they came at last to the promised land and the provision of manna ceased.

God provides for our needs as well. Some kids have experienced this in their lives:

Recently, third- and fourth-graders at Wheaton (IL) Christian Grammar School were asked to complete the following sentence: "By faith, I know that God is ..."

--"merciful, because my brother has been nice to me for a year" (Jeremy).

--"providingful, because he dropped manna for Moses and the people, and he gave my dad a job" (Brandon).

--"caring, because he made the blind man see, and he made me catch a very fast line drive that could have hurt me. He probably sent an angel down" (Paul).

--"faithful, because the school bill came, and my mom didn't know how we were going to pay it. Two minutes later, my dad called, and he just got a bonus check. My mom was in tears" (anonymous).

*Cornerstone newsletter. Leadership, Vol. 17, no. 3.*

God is "providingful." That's something that those on the Mission Trip to Kentucky experienced this past week. God provided for the retired couple who had lost their home in a fire—by sending our church's work team (and previous work teams) to build a new home. God

provided guidance in construction skills for the youth through Steve & Charlie. God provided strength for the workers, when they were exhausted. God provided for deepening faith through Rachel Guthrie & Rachel Tompkins. God is providingful.

And God provides abundantly for each one of us in the midst of our needs. In what ways have you seen God reaching out to help you? There are so many possibilities: through a friend or family member or mentor, through an unexpected gift, through God's healing power, through words of inspiration from the Bible or Christian music, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, through the abiding love of Jesus Christ. God provides abundantly.

God hears and God provides. And we... we trust and we remember. Trusting and remembering... these are also central to this Biblical account of the manna.

God commanded each person to gather one omer (that's about a half-gallon) of manna each morning. They were not supposed to take more than their fair share. And they were not supposed to take extra to store away for emergency. (Only on the day before the Sabbath could they take a double portion, since it needed to last for both days.) Now, not everyone obeyed God. Some took more than one omer—but when they went to eat it, they only had the standard amount. And some tried to hoard the manna, but any that was leftover became wormy and foul. The people learned by experience that they simply had to trust God. They need not worry, because God would supply exactly what they needed, nothing more, nothing less, day after day after day.

God hears our needs, God provides for us... and we, too, need to trust. That's not always easy. But when we do—when we put our faith fully in God, we grow to experience confidence and peace in him.

Think about it: where in your life right now, what specific concern that you're facing today, do you need to focus on trusting God? In the week ahead, I encourage you to continually turn this matter over to God in prayer and in trust.

God hears and God provides. We trust and... we remember. We remember. This Biblical passage in Exodus ends with a surprising command from the Lord. The people are to take a jar and put in an omer of manna. Then, this jar of manna is to be set in the holiest of places, in the ark of the covenant, alongside the stone tablets of the 10 Commandments. Wow! And why is this? In Exodus 16:32 we read: "This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.'" In other words, so that the people will remember.

It is essential that we remember the times that God has provided in our lives—how God has met our deepest needs with material help and spiritual support, out of his boundless love for us.

So, as you get ready to start the school year, or to begin a new venture, or to face the challenges of your daily life, consider finding an object to help you remember—just as the Hebrew people did. Maybe... a cross, a photograph, a thank-you note, a t-shirt from a mission trip, a stone from a spiritual retreat or from Camp Casowasco, a special song... Put it in a prominent place... and remember.

Life brings many needs, many challenges. But God hears our prayers, and provides for our needs. Let us trust him and remember. Amen.