

GOD PROVIDES – HE IS IN CHARGE

The Bible makes a strong assertion, provision comes from God. In a country where we are largely able to access what we need, when we need it, depending on God for anything, let alone our daily bread (or rice, pasta, beans or maize, or if you live in Scotland, tatties) can seem redundant (assuming a belief in God in the first place). It might appear that we don't need God to have enough to eat, or do we? How far would we really get if God withdrew His protection and care from us?

As a society we look up to those who are self-sufficient, self-made or independent. Being dependent on anyone or anything is seen as undesirable at best. This is not of course confined to our society, man is naturally rebellious, not wanting to be reliant on God.

Obviously I am not saying that we need to just sit back and do nothing. God ordained work as a good thing well before the fall from Grace. We are designed to be able to work, create and help others to do the same but we still need to rely on God as the source of all.

God's provision for us does not of course stop at the provision of daily food, or even our basic physical needs. We do not live by bread alone. God is the source of ALL that we need to keep us alive, physically as well as emotionally and spiritually.

Throughout the Bible, there are numerous examples of God's provision for those who trust Him. There are far too many to list, but He provided everything from the mundane (food and shelter) to the miraculous (healing, fire from heaven and making the sun stay still in the sky).

*Philippians 4:19: And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.*

During the past few months, that sometimes seem to have been a lot longer, we as Christians, along with everyone else have had to adjust to new ways of living. For a very short while, there were 'shortages' of basic items in the shops although of course we were never actually in danger of running out, it was just that demand outstripped supply. As we all know from the extensive coverage on the news, this was due to the system employed where products are supplied 'just in time' therefore avoiding waste and minimising the need for huge storage areas.

This chimes rather well with a theme that runs through the Bible which highlights the 'daily provision' of God. The Israelites in the desert had their daily needs met. They had to collect what they needed for one day only (except the Sabbath). Elijah was provided twice daily by ravens.

The oil and flour didn't run out for him and the widow of Zaraphath, they had enough every day that they needed it. Jesus taught His disciples to pray for their daily bread.

In the same way, God provides us with what we need daily. This does not mean that we should not be prudent in planning for the future, or that we should not put away as Joseph did in the grain stores. That is essential for the days when daily supply dries, up or for storing the harvested fruits of labour. What we are talking about today however, is the 'usual' plan. God gives us what we need daily and that applies to what we need spiritually too.

Some of us would love to be able to know the future. If only we knew what would happen in one day, one month or one year to come. However, that is not within our scope. God made us finite for a reason. He wants us to focus on the 'now' with Him and to be COMPLETELY reliant on Him.

Again, as with so much of life, this is not a hard and fast rule. Yes, God wants us to come to Him daily for His love, provision and teaching. He craves our company and wants us to know Him as He knows us. It does not mean in the least that it is not important to store up spiritual learning and knowledge. There will be times when we are unable to access His best for one reason or another but 'generally' God wants us to live in the present moment learning a new thing (although sometimes that new thing will take a considerable time to learn).

Every day God provides us with what we need to get through that day. Sometimes we only receive enough to get through the next few hours or minutes. He may use 'previous' learning or provision, but it is always 'fresh'. God does not serve leftovers. If we try to live on what we studied yesterday or to recycle something meant for another time it will not nourish us and can even make us ill. Remember the Israelites travelling in the wilderness, they were to gather enough manna for the day, except on the Sabbath when they gathered twice the amount the night before. If they gathered more than they needed and tried to keep it, they soon found that it was inedible and rotten in the morning. Had some hardy soul tried to carry on and eat it, firstly it would probably not have nourished them and secondly it could have even made them ill. Likewise, unless we are directed otherwise, spiritual nourishment is best when it is fresh.

So, how do we receive this from God? What does He feed us, and how does He feed us?

Firstly, what?

God feeds us with His word which is the Bible.

In 2 Timothy verses 16-17 it says: *'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work'.*

Secondly, how?

Reading the Bible, this includes listening to audio of Scripture being read.

Praying for wisdom and asking the Holy Spirit to help you understand.

Using Bible reading aids, there are many out there, traditional booklets, apps, videos etc. There are so many ways to have Scripture explained. Just be sure that the source you are using is trusted and reliable, there are some that may not be as helpful as others. If unsure, ask someone you trust like a leader / deacon.

Keep notes, they might be useful to look back on and think about what you are learning and you can also discuss them with others such as in small groups or with a prayer partner.

Be a bovine! Ruminant and chew over His words. Talk it over with God too, ask Him questions, He may surprise you!

Learn. Not my favourite if I am honest. It is good to learn scripture by heart so that if you don't have a Bible to hand, you can always have God's word to share with others or to encourage yourself. In some parts of the world, we are only too aware, access to written scripture is not possible. We don't know what lies in the future and who knows that we may not one day be forbidden from having written scripture. This is for me too, try to learn the words AND the reference. There is nothing more irritating than having to say (as I often do) 'it is something like..... or I think it is somewhere in....'

Other people can be a real encouragement. If you struggle to feed on His word, ask someone to partner you or join a small group. It is difficult to meet at the moment but we can still use technology.

Try to do something every day but don't be despondent if you find this impossible or 'forget'. God meets us where we are and uses whatever time we give Him. He is always delighted to spend time with us.

Brother Lawrence a 17<sup>th</sup> Century monk put it so well that I shall end on this quote from his book.

"He does not ask much of us, merely a thought of Him from time to time, a little act of adoration, sometimes to ask for His grace, sometimes to offer Him your sufferings, at other times to thank Him for the graces, past and present, He has bestowed on you, in the midst of your troubles to take solace in Him as often as you can. Lift up your heart to Him during your meals and in company; the least little remembrance will always be the most pleasing to Him. One need not cry out very loudly; He is nearer to us than we think."

— **Brother Lawrence, The Practice of the Presence of God**