



(John 21:18b). What Jesus said to Peter in reference to the manner of his death (John 21:19), becomes true for many as age returns us to a state of dependency. Others may have to care for us, tell us where to live, dress us, clean us, and provide for us when (as in childhood) we can no longer provide for ourselves.

God Provides in Old Age

Some people are able to carry out their stewardship over the things God has given them to the very end of their lives. Their health continues, their mind stays strong, and they may be able to leave to their children resources that will serve as an extension of God's provision even after they are gone. For some of us, however, age, health, and the decay of the mind may lead us to a stage in old age when our choices once again are limited. Jesus told Peter, **"when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish"**

Whatever our condition in old age, for all of us it is only for a few short years that we are given a stewardship. We are never truly masters of our lives. We have the responsibility to act as vehicles of God's provision to others. If we become disillusioned with God because others have failed in their stewardship, or consider it unfair that those we love have too quickly lost their ability to care for themselves, we may have misinterpreted this brief period of responsibility as if we were intended to be autonomous creatures in no need of God's provision. That is not who we are, or were ever intended to be! At every stage of life God is always behind the scenes offering the provisions necessary for our life here, while ultimately pointing us toward the eternal life that He will provide to those who seek Him. God's provision doesn't mean we always get everything we want, or that we will be delivered from every trial. The ultimate focus of all of God's provision, and the highest provision He desires to give to us lies in the age to come. Eternal life is the final stage for the child of God and the greatest demonstration of God's eternal provision for us (cf. Rev. 21:4-5). Obedience to the gospel demonstrates a trust in God to provide for us through every stage of life.



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Faithful Sayings Issue 22.40 October 4, 2020



ISSUE

22.40

October 4, 2020

Faithful Sayings

BULLETIN OF
THE OL-
SEN PARK
CHURCH OF
CHRIST

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM
10:00 AM
11:00 AM
Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter
Brady McAlister
Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Ryan Ferguson
Ben Hight
Blake McAlister
Walker McAnear
Sam Nunn
Lance Purcell
Justin Smiley
Kevin Wise
Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope

God's Provision for His People

By Kyle Pope

As humans, we often worry about how we will have the things we need as we pass through various stages of life. How will we make a living? What if the economy collapses? When we grow old, will we have enough money to provide for our needs when we can no longer work? While such concerns are natural and understandable, we must never forget that God extends provision to His people throughout every stage of life.

God Provides in Birth

Before a child is born, he or she has no idea all of the care, planning, and preparation that goes into its entrance into the world. There are special diets its mother adopts to guard its health. There are showers hosted to offer clothing and provisions for its future care. The room where it will sleep and play is painted and carefully furnished. When it is about to be born, the lives of parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles instantly stop for a brief time as miles are traveled, plans are rearranged, responsibilities are transferred in order to welcome it into the world. In its first hours, it will never truly know all of the doctors, nurses, and other staff who each contributed to the first moments of its life. When it comes home, it is amazing to see the efforts of its mother and father attending to its every need, while he or she (oblivious to all of this) begins its discovery of the world. It doesn't need to feel anxiety over food, shelter, clothing, or security—its every need is provided, even though it has no concept of the source of such pro-

vision or power to secure it for itself. All of this illustrates some amazing things about God's providential care for His people.

God told Jeremiah, **"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you"** (Jer. 1:5a). This was not only true for Jeremiah because of the plans God had for him (cf. Jer. 1:5b)—it is true for all of us. David said of God, **"You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb"** (Psa. 139:13) and **"Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed"** (Psa. 139:16a). No one who has ever lived had the slightest power, knowledge, or ability to mold the DNA, chromosomes, and cells that developed into the marvel that brings about our own existence. Before we were born, the mind of

God made provision for our conception and future life. The free-will actions of our parents played a role in this process, but God provided all of the building blocks from which our entire make-up is constructed. God set the rules and laws of nature that govern this process, and He sustains imperceptibly all of the conditions and reactions that allow its continuation. Paul said of Jesus, **"in Him all things consist"** (Col. 1:17) and the Hebrew writer speaks of Him as **"upholding all things by the word of His power"** (Heb. 1:3). When men lose faith and imagine that there is no God responsible for our lives how easy it is to ignore these facts. In ways far more fundamental to our existence than baby showers and room decorations, God lies behind every breath we take, every sensation our brain processes, and the continuing life and death of every cell in our body.

God Provides through Marriage and the Family

The reasons we lose sight of this may be multifold, yet at the heart of many of these problems is a failure to distinguish stewardship from mastery. To put it another way, we imagine that responsibility is autonomy. From the first stages of our life, when we have no ability to determine even the smallest choices about our existence, we gradually are allowed to assume more and more responsibilities (for a time). It starts with choices like, "What would you like for dinner?" or "What toys do you want to play with today?" These choices eventually expand into questions such as "Where do you plan to go to college?"—"What job will you choose?" or "Who will you marry?" At this stage of life, it is very easy to imagine that *we are in charge* and it's all up to us!

That is an illusion! We are just as dependant upon God's provision during the few short years in which we have a measure of responsibility, as are we were in our birth. We are not *masters*, we are *stewards*.

Let's consider how this works. As God would have it, in birth we are placed in the care of parents who are charged to make the freewill choices to bring us up **"in the training and admonition of the Lord"** (Eph. 6:4). They are to **"train"** us in the **"way"** we should go so that in older age, we will not **"depart from it"** (Prov. 22:6). This very arrangement and charge is part of the way God provides. Our parents have a stewardship to fulfill. As we grow, we become capable of working for a living and often responsible for our own family. Is God out of the picture during this stage? No. It is God **"who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food"** (2 Cor. 9:10). To mankind, it is God who has **"given him power to eat . . . to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor"** (Ecc. 5:19). All the materials necessary for industry, economy, and commerce that allow us to provide an income—all of the mental and physical capabilities that allow us to be able to work are given by God. This too is part of the way God provides. We have responsibility, but we are never autonomous and wholly independent.

Clearly, some parents neglect, ignore, or reject this responsibility. In some cases, circumstances may hinder parents or other family members from fulfilling their stewardship. This is where the entire question of the government's role becomes an issue. According to Scripture, government is charged to punish wrongdoing (Rom. 13:3-4), but it is not charged to *train* or *bring up* children. The church is charged to aid its own who cannot provide for themselves (1 Tim. 5:9-16), and individual Christians **"as we have opportunity"** are to **"do good to all"** (Gal. 6:10), but even in these cases the primary vehicle of God's provision is the family. Paul taught, **"if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever"** (1 Tim. 5:8).

It is when man fails, or one has no connection to the Lord's church, that government so often is left to bridge the gap. Unfortunately, a "safety net" may quickly become a "meal ticket," and systems born out of charitable intentions can evolve into tools of political manipulation. Yet, whether Christians find themselves under a free market, capitalistic democracy or under the most totalitarian socialistic state imaginable we must never surrender to the government the responsibility God has given us to be His stewards unto our families. This may look different in different cultures and at different times. The medieval serf may have been wholly dependent upon his feudal lord. The sharecropper may have been virtually enslaved to the landowner whose property he farmed. In such cases, God's provision may flow through those in positions over us, whether they are landowners, masters, or a socialistic government that funnels provision through the state. Christians can be Christians anywhere, and God can provide through many sources.