

ONE SIZE FITS ALL?

Jesus said, “Do not worry about your life...” about things that you need.

To those in captivity, God gives a similar message in Isaiah 49, stating that God is like a loving parent. God will deliver and God will provide.

The providence of God: words of comfort and assurance.

That concept is received in many different ways, including as hope, as encouragement or with skepticism, and so on.

Don't worry; God will provide beckons an inner longing to live without fear, to be protected,..... and to be free of worrying.

Contemplating that notion pulls us back to how things were when we were children.

The idea IS comforting, yet our engagement and response to God's providence varies widely.

Some may ignore it all together.

Some may overlay it as words of confirmation, “asserting that all their wealth and positions are proof that God is rewarding them.

That is thinking is called the Theology of prosperity.

But, Jesus didn't say that God's providence was conditional.

Using what is needed as a reward,.... is actually a little mean.

Others regard God's generosity as a contract of entitlement, using phrases such as “name it and claim it”.... or they blame God when God doesn't pay the bills on time..... or they give up on God.

Most of us wrestle with this at different levels: some with modest hope; some regard it as an insurance policy—to fall back on just in case, and others strive to rely on God providing for them,.... yet with reservations and questions.

And sometimes, from our confusion, these “fine words of comfort” lead us to judge each other, too.

So,..... what is going on? What do we do with this message?

To begin, let us assume the key premise is true: God is loving like a perfect parent. We are told this in the Bible.

God is a loving, nurturing, caring parent that provides “things” for us.

And, good parents provide for their children, regardless if the children are totally obedient.

As I said, using “needs” as a reward... or even as an enticement is Cruel.

Jesus did not say God's providing for us is contingent. Jesus didn't say, “IF you serve money, then you're out in the cold.”

Just as the grass and the birds are cared for, so are we.

This message isn't a carrot on a stick, nor is it about payment for good faithfulness. Jesus even stated, "...you of little faith"... will receive more than what is needed.

Therefore, like a wonderful, loving and caring parent God provides our needs and more..... And, don't ignore the "more" part.

Yet, we have trouble grasping this, and we wonder: "To what degree does this happen?" "To what extent does God intervene in the course of natural events?" "Does God print money, too?" Is this really true – Does God really provide?

There have been countless times in my life ... that I'm convinced, that God provided for my needs,... and more. Usually, I perceive God's involvement in hindsight, but not always. I have experienced some amazing, beyond coincidence, occurrences. God has provided.

One such example:

My divorce ordeal tended to taint / to cast a cloud over my attitudes and my optimism. During that turbulent time, I didn't see God's hand in anything, much less seeing my name tattooed on God's hand (referring to the Isaiah text). I was still at seminary and a single parent, and my recent events were proof to me that God wasn't controlling everything / that the world wasn't God's stage and we are God's puppets, or if it was that way, then I was in a tragedy.

Nevertheless, in hindsight, I realized God was working in the natural domain AND providing my needs, ... and more.

I began to realize that seminary was a very supportive and nurturing environment, an ideal place to recover from divorce. In addition, I had free access to some of the finest professors of psychology in the world, such as Wayne Oates. At the time, he was nearly 80. Back in the early 1960's, he was the one who coined the phrase "workaholic". He was a wise person, and I could call him anytime, and I did.

On one occasion, I was sensing the need to give my daughter Jessica some assurance. After all, living under the care of a father who is still a student, likely won't be the life of luxury. *Fifteen year olds "NEED" things.*

I called Dr. Oates, and told him that I was considering telling Jessica not to worry that I would provide all her basic needs. I asked him if I should give her that promise. He firmly replied, "NO. That is not good enough. A teenager requires More than just basic needs. You must promise her that all her needs will be met, and more."

Not, just the bargain basement needs,.... BUT more, that is what Jesus said, too.

Amazingly, Jessica did more than okay,.... but little did she know, life was day to day..... But,..... it happened,.... and God was in it, too.

Oh, one more example from that time period. For a number of months, I did not have any health insurance, and that was very unnerving,.... until... a few doors down, a young doctor, an intern, moved in. We became friends, and as it happened Jessica and I received free medical care until I was able to get insurance.

Nevertheless, my faith stories can prompt questions, such as “WHY ME?” Why this and not that? What about the very poor who are much worse off than me? Why do some suffer and others don’t? What is needed? Who determines the needs? Is it fair, and how do we evaluate each other’s needs? Should God’s benevolence be the same to all, and what if we are involved in the benevolence?..... and that is where the judgment part enters in.

No doubt, we could call basic human rights, “needs”, including food and shelter, and so forth. However, there are lots of other needs. Needs are subjective and situational, too.

My needs may not be your needs.

Some people may “need” to buy a large screen TV, yet not have enough money for food. Do we judge them by our standards, and our needs?

***ONE Size DOES NOT FIT ALL.**

I’ve asked Katherine to help me illustrate this.

[demonstration of Katherine’s need for warm clothing, and I as a parent providing too small, ugly, etc....]

Our needs are in the context of who we are and our situation in life.

*ONE size does not fit all.

Katherine changed. The situation changed. Culture changed, and likewise our needs and perspectives change, too.

And, notice that what fit Katherine wouldn’t fit me.

Forcing one standard / one size on everyone just doesn’t work.

For example: remember the tube socks? They were supposed to be one size fits all, yet in reality, they didn’t fit anybody.

Who needs socks that bundle and fold on top?

Moreover, we could extrapolate this further to include theology.

To be sure, there is bad and destructive theology, yet we are all at different places and our needs are different, too.

Let’s accept that for each other. Your theology may be different than mine, and that’s okay.

So,how can we tell the discern between a need and a want?

One person may “need” a big fund for retirement?.... or is that a want?

Another may “need” a new combine.... or ... a sports car... or is that a want?

A person may “need” to live on an acreage?.....

Another may just need a safe shelter?

How do we assess needs,..... or dare we?
And, if we can't, then how do we know if God is granting our needs?

What are our needs? What do you need?
And, in our culture,..... the reality is... we need more than just food and shelter.

Yet, the drug addict believes she needs money, but actually needs to feel the pain of the addiction.

A teenager may "need" the latest video game and gaming platform, yet... may really need more affirmation from his parents.

A parent may "need" to get that promotion to buy that fancy house, yet may really regret not spending more time with his son.

And, what if our perceived "needs" are stealing the needs from others?
When is enough enough?
Does God provide our needs and more, how does that work?

And,I don't advise anyone quitting their job.... expecting / demanding God to take care of them.
That perception is an egregious / gross misperception.

To the Matthew text for insight:

Jesus begins by saying, "We can NOT serve both God and money/ wealth."

As we know, money is a currency to an end..... to secure our wants and needs. For the most part, we manage our monetary affairs.
Most of us have to work, and we can't avoid being involved in the financial dynamics; however, Jesus didn't suggest avoidance / choosing God or money. It's not choose God and reject all things with money.

The problem Jesus presents is one of devotion / service.
Who do we trust? Where or what is our real investment?

When we try to be self-sufficient / when we attempt to **control** our destiny and situation in life, then we are taking on a heavy burden... a burden fraught with stress worries and concerns.
And, we all know the hazards from anxiety and worrying too much.

Therefore, it's a system issue..... because no one is a god / no one is powerful enough to really **control** life. So, it is a matter of who's in control.

We can NOT pour our devotion and passions into both.
We can NOT live as if we control our lives and also live without trying to control our lives. It is just a simple truth.

If worry is getting to us, then.... that is a good indicator for where our devotion / our trust lies.

In Verse 25, Jesus said, “Do not worry about your life... and those “needs”.
The Greek literally is “Take no thought”, which means don’t obsess / don’t worry.
Just don’t worry about fulfilling / satisfying “NEEDS”.

That’s Easier said than done, and plus,.... I just spent the last 10 or so minutes “talking / obsessing about such things.”

And, that is the beauty and wonder of God as a loving, caring parent.
God knows we struggle with faith, and yet God provides our needs,... and more.
God is doing that anyways. God is involved in our lives, in ways unique to each of us.

Moreover, just as Jesus is prompting us to consider this / to realize God’s providence,... I think God sometimes using things / satisfying needs to opens our eyes.... in order to draw us nearer to God.

My spirit needed some help / some prodding during my difficult time after divorce. I had some extra needs, and mostly I needed to sense God’s presence, compassion and love.

During that time, I began to realize God’s engagement in my life, I was able to live with less worry..... and thus focus on more important things, such as being a good parent.

The last verse in the pericope, verse 34, is the bottom line / a delightful realistic message.

Worrying about tomorrow is a certain indicator that we are extending our desire to control beyond our ability to control. The message also is clear that life is challenging and is not worry free. Each day has enough problems, and ... the present moment is really about as far as we can reach. We control now, and where we invest our tomorrow.

The Bible cogently states that God is a loving God that reaches out to us, nurtures and cares for us, and even reduces our worries.

God has got tomorrow covered,..... so we can focus on more important concerns, such as our relationship with God, living / walking with God... in God’s way ... or as Jesus said, in “God’s kingdom.”

We NEED NOT obsess/ worry about getting enough money to meet our needs, instead we can join in Christ’s procession of doing justice, benevolence, kindness and peace.

How that plays out for each of us varies as greatly as our needs are different. God can handle that / sort that out....

God is the only thing that fits all of us.

We walk with God as followers of Christ, with our own unique steps,... one day at a time.