

"We who have run for our very lives to God have every reason to grab the promised hope with both hands and never let go. It's an unbreakable spiritual lifeline, reaching past all appearances right to the very presence of God where Jesus, running on ahead of us, has taken up his permanent post as high priest for us..."¹

It only appears in this text figuratively and one time in literal reference to a shipwreck in Paul's letters. The CCLI song database lists 79 songs that refer to it and this list doesn't even include many of the old hymns. The Greek world, in which all of the New Testament was first composed in Greek, uses it as a picture of hope. What is it? It is the word "anchor". Though the anchor serves a ship like a parking brake serves a car, the symbolic meaning of "anchor" draws reference to one of the most powerful spiritual images, alongside the cross, in all of Christian life. Today, it begs the questions for us: To what are you grabbing hold? What are you counting on to keep you steady?

John Calvin, a reformed theologian credited in being one of the fathers of Presbyterianism, considers that we are all, spiritually that is, individual boats floating in an open ocean looking for a dock. Starting with the foundation that we are all first and foremost citizens of heaven and not of earth, our earthly life is thus a vessel helping us get home, and our greatest hope and prize is the dock of our final destination at home in glory with God. *Ponder the image he paints for a moment. Our individual lives can be likened to boats a drift at sea looking for a dock.* What does that suggest? One consideration is whether that suggests we are all refugees in some way? More physically thinking and in reference to our series theme *Standing on the Promises of God*, how do we stand on God as our solid rock if we are a float? What do we grab hold of or count on when the seas have days and seasons in which the white caps loom large, and swells dig deep? How do we hang on when the winds blow relentlessly from all directions? When the seas roar and the winds hurl, we need something (someone) in which we are counting on to keep us steady, right? Right!

And God is undoubtedly the most reliable tether and anchor we could ever have or need when it comes to providing for us throughout life. All throughout scripture, God promises and delivers on provisions for God's most beloved creation, us. Because God IS love, light, hope, peace, grace, and joy, and because God loves us and is faithful to his covenant relationship with us, we can be assured that God can and God will provide all of what we need. The apostle

¹ Hebrews 6:18-20, The Message

Paul said it this way in Philippians 4:19, **“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Jesus Christ.”** For the things we truly long for and need most, God is in abundant supply, ready and willing to provide.

If I were a betting man, I wouldn't bet that many of us sit around thinking about the word “Provision.” It is fair to say it is weightless word. We may very well use it euphemistically when we stock up on “provisions” for our road trip, including Twizzlers and combos and the like. We may use it to refer to unexpected upgrades in life like “The Lord opened the door for my promotion at work” or “The Lord provided our church with the means to get that new steeple or sound system.” Some of us may even remember times when God has provided for us our needs in obvious ways like a check in the mail to cover rent or the generosity of a friend to pay for a hospital bill. I worked with a pastor once who, in moving to a new call, had a parishioner from the new church pay off all of his seminary debt 😊. We would refer to each of these as God's provision, but we rarely depend on provision.

In Matthew 6 (Jesus' Sermon on the Mount), Jesus preaches, **“Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they...? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin...? But if God so clothes the grass of the field..., will he not much more clothe you.... Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”** In these verses, Jesus shows one end of the spectrum of God's provision. God cares for the smallest and even the inanimate in creation. God clothes them and feeds them. God's eye is on them as treasured created things. So why should we worry about God's provision? Are we not God's children? Will God not provide as a father ought, exactly those things that are best for us without hesitation and always at the right time?

At our worst is when we think of God's provision as if God is a waiter: we signal God to our life, place our orders in “faith,” and receive what we have requested. More often, giving us all the benefit of the doubt, we are not so trite. We do think of God providing for us – jobs, family, friends, care, church, abilities, answered prayers. These things are significant and meaningful; they are absolutely a portion of God's provision to us. But too often we stop there, and in doing so we stop short of the deep reality of what God can and God will provide truly means. What it truly means is rooted in the story of Abraham in Genesis 22, when Abraham gives God the name *Jehovah Jireh*, meaning

“The Lord will provide.” Where it appears in the story is when God provides for Abraham a ram in the thicket to use in place of the sacrifice of Abraham’s son Isaac. **“So, Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.”**

Our need of God and God’s provisions are much deeper than the surface and the good news is not only that God is willing to go deeper, but that God knows what we need at the deepest levels and God can and will meet us there to provide what we need. We need God to provide for us in our spirit and soul, in the places where we stuff our sins and our fears as if as long as the world can’t see those sins and fears we aren’t really suffering from them. It is in our spirit and soul that we encounter and experience the true blessing and power of God’s provisions in our life.

Jesus is quoted in the Gospel of John: **“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”**

Brothers and sisters in Christ, God can and God will provide.

Max Lucado, in his book *Unshakable Hope*, draws reference to our need of an anchor in life when he asks, “Is what you are holding on to stronger than what you may be going through?” What are we going through? What storms are upon us? The war in Ukraine, Covid, unrealistically busy lives, challenging work environments, sky rocketing fuel prices, economic concerns, everchanging cultural trends and pressures, a move, a loved one who is ill or hurt or dying. To what are we grabbing hold of and counting on for stability?

Lucado continues, “Everyone is anchored to something. A retirement account or a resume. Some are tethered to a person; others are attached to a position. Yet these are surface objects. Would you anchor your boat to another boat? Heaven forbid. You want something that goes deeper and holds firmer than other floating vessels. But when you anchor to the things of this world, are you not doing the same? Can a retirement account survive a depression? Can good health weather a disease? There is no guarantee. Salty sailors would urge you to hook on to something hidden and solid. Don’t trust the buoy on the water, don’t trust the sailors in the next boat, and don’t trust the other boat. In fact, don’t even trust your own boat. When the storm hits, trust no one but God.”²

Proverbs 3:5-6 says, **“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”**

² Lucado, Max. *Unshakable Hope*. Pg. 161.

This is our charge today. God can and God will provide! Can you trust and believe that God can and God will provide? Yes, you can with God's help. You can hold tight to God's promises. God's love for you is something you can consistently hold on to and it will hold you tight when you are confused, lonely and uncertain. Life is full of stormy seas. Trials will come. When they do, you can trust and believe that God can and God will provide.

Will you? Will you trust and believe that God can and God will provide for you? Again, I hope you will join with me in saying yes, I will with God's help. Romans 8:28 says, **“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”** Do we know this? Do we believe it? Will we trust it to be true in our lives?

What might this look like? In the same book I have been referencing by Max Lucado, he shares a personal story of God's provisions for him in his day-to-day work.³

I'd spent three days staring at a computer screen writing this book. An hour after lunch my brain slipped into neutral, and my eyes began to cross. I knew I needed to take a break. I live ten minutes from a golf course. So, within short order I was on the first tee box, golf club in hand, walking down the first fairway, relishing the spring-day warmth. My phone beeped. I read the text. A coworker informed me of a staffing change at church. *Hmm, wonder why he didn't ask me about the decision.* I put the phone in my pocket and decided to give him the benefit of the doubt. That attempt at kindness lasted until the second fairway. I felt a snarl welling up inside me. *He should have asked me.* By hole number three I was gripping the driver way too tightly. On the fourth hole I saw an image of my coworker's face on the ball before I whacked it. Number five was a disaster. I envisioned a shouting match with him! By the time I reached the putting green, I'd resigned, fired him, gone on strike, and moved to Mexico.

You might say I am prone to overreactions. I can tailspin into a valley of negativity within a matter of well, within a matter of five golf holes. Oh, you should have seen me, dragging my golf clubs with one hand, shaking a fist at the devil with the other. You should have heard me. It's a good thing no other golfers were out on that Wednesday afternoon. I would have earned some angry stares.

On the path between holes five and six, God spoke to me. He asked me about this book. He reminded me of its thesis. And he didn't have to ask the question. I knew it before he said it, are you putting it into practice? I wasn't. I was standing on the problems of life, not on the promises of God. So, I reached into the arsenal of promises and pulled one out. I remembered the words of Isaiah 40:31, **“But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and**

³ Lucado, Max. *Unshakable Hope*. Pg. 162-163.

not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” God can and God will provide. God is in charge, not me, and I will wait on God to work. I will trust in God lean not on my own understanding.

I replied to the text and requested a five-minute conversation. By the time I reached the sixth green, my phone rang. I asked, “Were you going to include me in this decision?” “Of course! No decision has been made! I was just informing you of one option.” That is all it took. I was fine. The anger was gone. The bad news? The devil got my attention. The good news? He didn’t have it for long. The promises of God were a fire extinguisher on his flame. The promises of God work. When we grab hold and clutch them like the precious pearls they are, they provide for us. The promises of God to provide for us in what we need most can and will buoy us in the day-to-day difficulties and can and will walk us through horrific tragedies.

Can we trust? Will we trust? And not just with surface level provisions, but provisions for our spirit and soul?

Consider this quote, **“In order to realize the worth of the anchor, one needs to feel the stress of the storm.”** Our faith is put to the test and best demonstrated during the deepest trials of life. How grateful are we then for the sure and steadfast anchor of hope we have in God?

To close today I want to return to the start of the Hebrews text we read. One translation offers, **“We who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.”** This hope is what the believer has **“fled to take hold of.”** We let go of all the worldly sources of temporal hope to grab a hold of the only true and lasting source of hope. Once we firmly take hold of this hope we are indeed **“greatly encouraged.”** Hope, as understood throughout the scriptures, is not a wishful thought but a confident expectation of absolute certainty. “Hope is the confidence that what God has done for us in the past guarantees our participation in what God will do in the future.”⁴

The chorus of a hymn entitled *We Have an Anchor* reminds us, boats a drift at sea looking for our prize dock, that:

*We have an anchor that keeps the soul
Steadfast and sure while the billows roll
Fastened to the Rock that cannot move
Grounded firm and deep in the Savior’s love!*

Let all God’s people say... Amen.

⁴ Holman Bible Commentary