

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

Names of God—Jehovah Jireh/God will Provide (or God our Provider)

The reality is that it is difficult to worship God if we don't first see Him as our provider (and we could rightly add, sustainer). That's why it's not coincidental that the first time we see the word "worship" ("shachah" in Hebrew) used is in the passage we looked at on Sunday of God asking Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice, then stopping him and providing a ram instead. It is in this passage, Genesis 22, that we see Abraham acknowledge God as Provider (Jehovah Jireh).

I find it interesting that it took 22 chapters into the Bible for that to be acknowledged. From the very beginning we see God as a provider—creation, life, covering for sin, protection from runaway sin (tower of Babel, and the Flood), fulfilling promises—again, all in the first 22 chapters of Scripture. But it's one thing to READ about God being a provider, it's another thing to ACKNOWLEDGE God as our provider, of all the tangible and intangible aspects of our lives. Like Abraham, that acknowledgment, that understanding, becomes clearer as we OBEY God.

One of the basic rhythms of the Hebraic worldview is that of knowing and doing, doing and knowing. Similar to inhaling and exhaling. Unlike Greek/Hellenistic thought (which western civilization—i.e. you and me—is based on) knowing for knowledge sake is not a value. As author Steven Garber puts it, *"A mind without a heart is nothing"*. Knowing means doing. Abraham knew God as Provider because he did something, he obeyed. More important than Abraham's experience, Jesus makes this point clearly, *"Now this is eternal life: that they may KNOW you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent."* (John 17:3) And, *"If you hold to my teaching (doing), you are really my disciples. Then you will KNOW the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

The point is, the difference between KNOWING God and knowing ABOUT God is doing/obeying. The "doing" that is consistent with the understanding of knowing God as Provider is thanksgiving and worship. Consider Peter's confession of faith, his acknowledgment of Jesus being the Christ, the Son of living God (Matthew 16:16), came after several months of following and obeying Jesus. The life of faith is one in which we come to know/understand more the more we obey.

The "doing" is also important as it keeps us from just sitting around doing nothing, presumptuously thinking, "God will provide". Paul attacks such thinking in II Thessalonians 3:10b, *"If a man will not work, he shall not eat."* It has been God's plan from the beginning that we work in partnership with Him in this thing we call life. The most important aspect of any partnership is trust; trusting that our partner has our best interest in mind and not just looking out for themselves. A solid partnership is built on good character from both/all partners. If you'll recall the first recorded sin in Scripture, Satan was able to convince Adam and Eve that God couldn't be trusted, that He was holding out on them. Ever since, mankind has had to overcome the hurdle of mistrust...even though God's track record is impeccable.

This is part of the significance of the testing of Abraham in offering Isaac. It seems that Abraham went along with the plan without any recorded hesitation. In fact, we tend to read into the passage how hard it must have been for Abraham...namely because of how hard it would be for us, and any loving parent. Now I'm not saying that the whole situation was easy for Abraham, or that he wasn't a loving parent, but what we don't want to miss is that in many other ancient near east religions, the supposed deities often required child sacrifice. That's part of the reason why the whole idea was not as foreign to Abraham as it is to us. The key point, however, is that God wanted to demonstrate that He is not like those other deities. While He does require devotion, He is not like those other gods; He wanted to differentiate Himself from those other deities. So, God Himself provided the sacrifice. This is obviously a key storyline throughout Scripture...God Himself provides the needed sacrifice. What He desires from us, as Paul aptly states, is to be living sacrifices (Romans 12:1)

We catch another glimpse of how different our God is in the famous line from Hosea that Jesus used in response to the Pharisees who noted that Jesus hung around with sinners and tax collectors, *"Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'"* (Matthew 9:13, Hosea 6:6). God is a God of mercy whose ultimate desire is that we demonstrate our devotion to Him by becoming like Him. The obedience God wants from us is how He trains us to be like Himself...and remember, it's as we obey Him that we come to understand Him.

Q. Think back over the past 24 hours. Identify something God has provided you with. Think back over the past week...the past month...the past year...the past decade.

Q. Describe a time when God blew your socks off in how He provided for you...the right thing, at the right time.

Exercise: List as many things as you can think of that God has provided for you. (Don't be lazy and simply say "everything"—as true as that is—actually itemize as much as you can.

How do you want to respond to God for all that?

Perhaps make it a habit of "counting your blessings" on a regular basis, so as to experience as God as our Provider, as well as a way of cultivating an attitude of gratitude.

Q. Describe a time (perhaps even presently) when you were anxious if God was going to provide for you or not. Or, to ask it another way, describe a time when you doubted God's goodness toward you.

Q. Have you ever felt "tested" by God? Explain.

Q. Not only does God provide FOR us, but sometimes (maybe often times) He provides THROUGH us. When was a time that God provided through you? When was a time when God provided for you through someone?

- Q. Being relatively independent and individualistic people, do you find it challenging to receive from others? Or, how are you tempted to provide for yourself, to “pull yourself up by the boot straps”?**
- Q. How, or in what ways, are you struggling to obey God? How can your Home Group help you? (We could ask this communally as well: How are WE—as a people—struggling to obey God?)**