

Good morning everyone, welcome—and a special welcome to those of you who are here visiting family or friends during this Christmas season. My name is Mark Peters, I'm one of the Pastors here at North Shore Alliance.

As I begin, I would like to engage you for a moment with an odd question—if you could just indulge me for a moment—*how many of you have a nickname?*

I have one friend who is called “**Tiny Shoes**” because he has small feet. Another friend has been aptly nicknamed “**Weasel**”. Nicknames, while often silly, can function like a caricature—they highlight an aspect of the person's appearance, character, or personality; a well-deserved nickname can tell you a lot about a person. And while God doesn't have a nickname, all throughout Scripture God reveals Himself by different names. And with each name, a particular aspect of His life and character is brought into view.

At times in the Old Testament, God is called **El Olam**—*the God of Eternity*—it communicates the idea that God is uncreated, without beginning or end. At times God is called, **Yahweh Rapha**—*the Lord who Heals*. At times God is called **Yahweh Shalom**—*the Lord is Peace*. These names of God function as descriptors of His being, and so it would be right to say, God is Eternal, God is Healing, God is Peace.

As we come to the end of 2014 and think about the New Year, I want to speak about a character quality of God that never gets old. God has revealed Himself by the name **Yahweh Jireh**—*the Lord will Provide*—and this morning I want to speak about His provision.

The Bible teaches that God is the Creator and Sustainer of every living thing. Colossians 1:16-17 says, “*For by him (**Jesus**) all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and **in him all things hold together.***”

Hebrews 1:3 says: “*The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, **sustaining all things by his powerful word.***”

God's provision keeps everything going—every sunrise and sunset, the changing of the seasons, the ocean tides, gravity, breathing in and out—everything depends on the life of God; He is the One who sustains, enables, and provides.

The implications of this truth are enormous. It means that we are not self-determining; it means that we are dependant creatures. It means that God is for us. God wouldn't sustain a universe He didn't care about. God wouldn't sustain your life unless you are important, valuable, and special. You are. God's provision is an expression of His deep love for us.

And His provision for the universe neither cold nor distant; it's intensely personal—He's passionately interested in the daily details and rhythms of our lives.

More than 3000 years ago, King David, was so overwhelmed with the wonder of God's intimate care and provision, that he penned some of the greatest lyrics ever written—we can find them in Psalm 103. Let me encourage you to turn there with me right now.

I'm going to read selectively from this Psalm, beginning with the first 5 verses. *"Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's."*

As we begin 2015, where do you need the provision of God? Do you need His **forgiveness**? Verse 12 says, *"as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."*

As you think about 2015, are you in need of **healing**? Do you need to be **renewed and restored**? Are you bound by your past, by addictions—do you need God to set you free? Do you need to know you are **loved**? These are the kinds of things God is talking about when He says, *"I will provide."*

Let's pick up David's song in verses 8-10. *"The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbour his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities."*

Illus: In the Fall of 1993, I moved to Regina, Saskatchewan to attend Canadian Bible School. When the Christmas break arrived, I hopped in my 1982 Volkswagon Jetta with three friends, and we drove home to Vancouver.

On the return trip, I had to ferry around and pick up my friends from different parts of the Lower Mainland. I picked up Chris Lundstrom

from North Van, and then we drove to Abbotsford, to pick up the other two. We were on our way, cruising down the #1 highway, headed for Regina.

You know how it is when you're driving with friends—you get talking, telling stories, laughing, and inexplicably the scientific properties of your foot begin to change. Your foot begins to morph, getting heavier and heavier until finally, it transforms into lead, which causes a chain reaction with the gas pedal—before you know it, through no fault of your own, you're speeding.

We all know the science, but try explaining that to an RCMP officer. I had been on the highway for less than 15 minutes when I was pulled over—I was a broke college student and instantly I was \$150 poorer.

By a show of hands, how many of you have ever gotten a speeding ticket? Let me ask you, when you receive a speeding ticket, how do you feel? Do you feel satisfied that justice was served? **Nooo!** We're frustrated! We might have been caught red-handed, we might deserve the ticket, but everything in us wants the police officer to pardon us, to let us go—we want what we don't deserve.

When I got the ticket I was angry—angry with myself—I couldn't afford to speed because I couldn't afford to pay the ticket. As the day went on the frustration wore off and we arrived in Calgary. We stopped for quick bite to eat and decided to drive through the evening until we got to Regina.

How many of you have ever driven through Medicine Hat? For those who have, you know how sneaky they are with their speed limit

signs. When you get close to the city limits, there are signs posted that decrease the speed limit—or so I’m told, I never saw the sign—but I did see blue and red lights flashing in my rearview mirror.

Dutifully, I pulled over to the side of the highway and turned off the engine. I was livid—2 tickets in a little more than 12 hours of driven. When the officer approached my window, I had my license and registration ready—I handed it to him without saying a word. When he left, the car was silent—none of my friends said a word.

When the officer came back, he asked if I had any photo ID. My Saskatchewan drivers license was just a piece of paper and the only photo ID I had was my student ID from Canadian Bible College.

He took one look at the ID and said to me, “*So you’re at Bible School?*” I nodded. He continued, “*So you probably can’t afford this ticket?*” I nodded again. He continued, “*Make sure you slow down the next you come through.*”

Hallelujah, hallelujah! Words cannot describe the joy I felt! I didn’t get what I deserved, and I loved it! The wonder of God’s provision is that He doesn’t treat us as our sins deserve—the punishment we deserved, Jesus took willingly upon Himself.

As I think about the provision of God, it evokes within me a sense of wonder. The God of the universe has concerned Himself with me and you. We are not nameless or faceless; He doesn’t treat like a “number;” He knows us completely, He knit us together in our mother’s womb.

Psalm 103:2 says, “*Praise the Lord...and forget not all His benefits*”. Let me ask you this morning, *how have you experienced God’s personal provision?*

Not every provision comes with dramatics; not every desire is met in the way we want or ask, but God is always faithful. These days, God’s provision in my life has been of a different kind. He’s been providing me with strength to persevere; as I turn to Him he’s giving hope in the midst of trouble. Let me ask you, *where do you need the Lord’s provision today?*

In the time remaining, I want to talk briefly about how we go about receiving what God plans to provide. I said earlier that we are dependant on God to provide, but we too have a part to play. Alexander MacClaren once wrote, “If a [person] chooses to sit outside the baker’s shop, [they] may starve on its threshold”.¹ *What good are the gifts of God if we don’t orient ourselves towards the Giver?*

In Psalm 103:11, 13, 17, there is a repeating refrain. Verse 11 says, “*For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him.*” Verse 13 says, “*As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.*” Verse 17 says, “*But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD’s love is with those who fear him*”.

Biblically speaking, to “fear God” is not a reference to being afraid. Instead, this phrase speaks of relationship. Biblically speaking, to

¹ Alexander Maclaren, as quoted by Anne Spangler, *The Names of God*.

fear God means to love Him, to follow Him, to honour and worship Him.

Now, in a general sort of way, God provides for all people—without His provision, the earth would stop turning, the Sun would cease burning, we would stop breathing, etc. But in a specific way, it is those who enter the baker’s shop that find food. And it is we, who live in dependance on God, that discover He has all we need.

On one occasion, Jesus sat down to rest beside a well, near the city of Samaria. And He engaged in a spiritual conversation with a woman who had come to draw water. He said to her, *Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.*² What He said to her that day, He says to us today—**I am the answer to the thirst of your soul.**

On another occasion, Jesus said to a crowd, *I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.*³ What Jesus said to the crowd, He says to us today—**I am the answer to the hunger of your soul.**

What Jesus made plain is that He is both the Giver and the Gift. He is what we need—all provision lies in Him—and we experience God’s provision as we walk in relationship with Him.

We might need strength, or wisdom, or courage, or forgiveness. We might need healing, or love, or hope, or wholeness—Jesus is both the Giver and the Gift.

We need to understand that God doesn’t dispense these things like a clerk in a store. We do not approach the counter and say to God, *“I’ll take a bottle of strength, a pinch of wisdom, and three pounds of courage please.”* This is not how God provides—the greatest gifts He gives are wrapped up in Himself. **The answer to many of our needs is not something—it’s Someone.**

When we come asking for strength, He doesn’t fill a bottle—He fills us with Himself; He is the Mighty God. When we come asking for wisdom, He doesn’t put a pinch in a packet—He fills us with Himself; He is a Wise Counsellor.

Conclusion: As I conclude this morning, once again I ask, *where do you need the Lord’s provision today?* Make your need the place of prayer.

Pray

² John 4:13-14.

³ John 6:35.