

THE GOD GUARANTEE

*Finding Freedom from
the Fear of Not Having Enough*

JACK ALEXANDER



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To Lisa . . .
my loving wife and a model of holistic generosity.

To Randy Pope . . .
my faithful pastor, mentor and friend.

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Foreword

The book you are about to read by Jack Alexander doesn't fit neatly into any of the typical contemporary Christian book categories.

It's not a self-help book. In fact, it's sharply critical of the “you can have a great life today” literature. It actually tells us to *expect* that things will sometimes go wrong, that we will be broken, that things will fall apart. However, there is a deeply biblical, hopeful realism here—that troubles will come, yet our afflictions can turn us into something great (see 2 Corinthians 4:17). Jack shows us that only through the furnace of affliction can our ore become gold or our coal become diamonds.

It is also not a conventional book on stewardship, which would lay out all the reasons why and how and how much you should give. Those are important, but in this volume Jack goes deeper—and moves earlier in the sequence of motivation. He has wisely discerned that most people's resources are locked away, hardly to be shared, perhaps even despite

sound biblical and practical arguments, because of a particular kind of heart attitude that makes generosity hard. What is it?

This book understands that at the root of an ungenerous heart is not mere stinginess or greed but *fearfulness*. Accumulating resources is often a way we try to take control of our own world and fend for ourselves because we fear we can't trust God. That is the reason we don't see what Jack calls the capacity of so many situations for doing good. That is why we become crushed by suffering rather than growing through it. And that is why we are so ungenerous with ourselves and our assets. America is filled with comfortably prosperous people who mostly feel they don't have enough. They are dominated and controlled by a pervasive sense of resource scarcity and precariousness.

Jack confronts this problem directly to clear the way for a life of vision, durability, joy, and generosity. He does so through two crucial insights.

First, he shows that fear is fundamentally selfish. In our fear, we do not think of ourselves as being self-absorbed, but 1 John 4:18 tells us that the opposite of love is not hate but fear. This is so because love makes us think of others, while fear makes us think mainly of ourselves. Love always makes us vulnerable. Fear refuses that vulnerability and makes self-protection the priority. So to become more generous, we must first deal with the self-absorbed fear that keeps us from trusting God and loving others.

Second, Jack observes that our practice of biblical generosity is one key to our *own* provision. God demonstrates that he provides for us in and through our relationships—first with him, then with others.

Throughout the book, Jack uses Jesus's miracle of the loaves and fish to illustrate God's pattern for provision. Let me reinforce his main ideas by pointing to another Bible passage that speaks to this important issue of how Christians can move from a spirit of scarcity and fear to one of abundance and provision.

In Acts 4, we read of a community of deep economic sharing and generosity:

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection. . . . From time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. (vv. 32–35)

It was also a community where “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (v. 31). We learn here that a basic mark of being Spirit-filled is boldness. Why is that? Romans 8:15–16 illustrates that the Spirit's work is to oppose a spirit of fear. If the Holy Spirit brings the opposite of fearfulness, the mark of Spirit-filledness would of course be fearlessness. But, specifically, how does the Holy Spirit make us fearless? The Romans passage tells us that the Spirit assures us that we are children of God. (In the same way, the Spirit assured and empowered Jesus for ministry at his baptism, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” [Matthew 17:5].)

This, then, is the nature of Spirit-boldness: it is a deep assurance of the Father's love for us personally through Christ.

The Acts text shows us that this assurance of God’s love influences not only our words but also our actions. Luke clearly saw the lifestyle of radical giving of ourselves and the sharing of our resources as proceeding from a heart that has been changed through the filling of the Holy Spirit.

What if this sense of assurance is missing? Look at financial generosity. Most people do not come close to meeting the biblical guideline on giving (10 percent of our income or a “tithe”; see Malachi 3:8–10; Luke 11:42). Why? Giving means we have less stored away in case of a crisis—it’s a security issue. Giving means the people we give to might misuse the money—it’s a control issue. Giving means we can’t think of ourselves as securely wealthy—it’s a self-esteem issue. At the root of all these issues is fear and lack of trust.

But the reality of God’s saving love, brought home in assurance by the Holy Spirit, changes that fear. We see that God is far more committed to our good than we believed. Look at what he did through Jesus! We see, then, that God can be trusted. Jesus is now more “precious” (1 Peter 2:7) than anything else. When we have him, even diamonds look expendable.

This is not a self-help book, though Jack reminds us that we do have a responsibility and a role to play in overcoming scarcity. God uses our generosity in relationships to provide for others—and to provide for us.

This is not a stewardship book, though I would consider it an excellent “pre-stewardship” resource. Jack knows that the question “Will I have enough?” always comes before “Why, what, and how am I to give?” Possibly the greatest service this book renders to the church is to answer that first question

convincingly so that the next ones can be answered with freedom and joy.

One more observation about Jack's insightful, helpful volume. It's not a devotional. But it will send you to your knees.

Dr. Timothy Keller
Chairman, Redeemer City to City

Acknowledgments

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Acknowledgments

and provisions in overcoming this fear and having people lean into faith and holistic generosity.

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Thanks also to Tim Keller who wrote the foreword and focused all readers on the importance of finding freedom from this fear of scarcity and recognizing that fear, not hate, is the opposite of love.

I am grateful to the Lord for his patience, grace, and help in my time of need as I have overcome many of my own fears.

Introduction

Searching for Enough

By anyone's standards, Jaden Hayes has had a hard childhood. His father died when he was four, and then just two years later, Jaden discovered his mother's body after she died in her sleep.

The six-year-old boy stoically endured another funeral and then went to live with his aunt. According to multiple news reports, he told her he was "tired of all the sad faces." He wanted to know how to make people happy again. She suggested the best way to make someone smile is to smile at them first. And so, just weeks after his mother's death, Jaden began what's become known as the Smile Experiment. He and his aunt went into the city of Savannah, near their Georgia home, and approached people who looked sad or serious. Jaden would smile at them and—to hedge his bets—offer them a small toy.

"It's like sheer joy came out of this child," said his aunt. "And the more people that he made smile, the more this light shone."¹

I first heard about Jaden and his experiment more than a year ago, and it still brings tears to my eyes every time I think about it. I wasn't the only one who was touched. National media picked up Jaden's story, and people across the country responded with gifts, including photos of their own smiles for Jaden.

What made Jaden's story so special that it became a national movement? It spoke to the feelings of loss and hopelessness that are all too familiar to many of us today. We look at Jaden and wonder, *How could a boy who lost so much be able to give so much?*

Instead of giving in, as we are so often tempted to do, Jaden Hayes overcame. In a world driven by isolation, doubt, and, perhaps most of all, scarcity, this boy found a way through.

Not Enough

Scarcity is a word that has come up often in the past decade. Everyone from psychologists to advertising executives to talk-show guests have tried to explain, and sometimes capitalize on, the ways scarcity shapes us as humans. But when we take away all the scientific talk, what does it really mean?

The sense of scarcity, simply defined, is the fear that there is too little of something to go around—that there might be too little for us.

What if I don't have enough to retire?

How will I pay these medical bills?

Can we really afford to have a child?

But the insidious effects of a scarcity mentality go even deeper. The fear of “not enough” affects our spirits as well as our wallets.

Do I have enough time to invest in this new project?

Do I have the emotional energy to get involved with that person in need?

What if I don't have enough left for me?

These questions, and many like them, plague our culture. Ever since the Great Recession, many of the people I meet struggle with a sense of loss and a dark view of the future. I've talked with dozens of families who feel as if they live on the edge of a knife, worrying that one unexpected bill or crisis will push them into a situation they can't afford. And when I look at the numbers, it's easy to see why.

Technology creates an "always-on" expectation, expanding the average length of the American workweek even as our paychecks decrease. The average American has not experienced an increase in his or her real income, adjusted for inflation, since 2000. Our retirement accounts have shriveled up, and working adults who once felt stable now take on crushing debt to cover the skyrocketing costs of education and health care. Class warfare dominates the landscape as the gap between the rich and the poor reaches record levels. For the first time in American history, the next generation of working- and middle-class adults is not likely to surpass their parents' generation in education, income, or opportunity.

However, the problems that plague us are about far more than the size of our bank accounts. Our stress levels are rising, and our spirits are stretched as thin as our budgets. A steady stream of tragedy and scandal fills the news, leaving us feeling helpless as we double lock our doors and eye every stranger with suspicion. The culture demands that we not offend anyone, even as the tone of public debates and discourse grows uglier by the day.

In short, the messages all around us tell us to be afraid—and it's easy to believe them.

Fear is a suffocating emotion. It leaves us feeling selfish, bitter, and disconnected from others. Scarcity is an offshoot of fear that makes us see the world as zero sum, where anything you get means there's less for me. If I give some of myself or my resources, then there won't be enough left for my needs.

There's just not enough—whether we're talking about money, trust, or even love—to go around. Bit by bit, the resulting sense of scarcity grinds us down into hopelessness.

At least that was my experience. It's important for you to know this isn't just a book about other people's problems. For much of my life, fear and scarcity were my own constant companions.

I met them when my father, like Jaden's, died unexpectedly. I was only nine years old. My mother remarried, but it was not a happy union. In fact, my mother and her husband seemed to hate each other for most of their marriage. Growing up, I heard endless fights about money. They argued about small things, like what account to use to pay certain bills or what to do with small and sentimental inheritances. According to my stepfather, there was never enough.

He was just as stingy emotionally as he was with the single dollar he put into the church offering plate each week. My sisters and I were not encouraged to dream. Instead, we were scolded if we did not achieve. There was no grace, no safety net.

I responded by working harder. If no one else could be trusted to meet my needs, I reasoned, I would have to do it myself. I delivered newspapers during never-ending, icy New England winters and caddied at the country clubs during the

long, humid summers. I worked long hours as a busboy and rode the late-night bus home.

My world was a world of scarcity. We had no excess money or love or comfort. I learned not to expect them. Instead, I worked throughout college and studied business and accounting—the safe, smart, responsible choice. After college, I took a job in accounting. I supported myself comfortably, and, on the outside, everything was fine.

Yet everything was not fine. The lessons we learn as children stick with us, and my childhood teacher was fear. It kept me from taking risks, from following my heart. It made me see everything in life as a competition. I started gambling my income in poker games. If I didn't win, I felt as if I would die.

My life was missing something, and I felt as if I was always struggling to avoid falling into a hole.

When I was twenty-five, I wrote the “10 Rules of Alexander,” an idealistic and self-motivating challenge designed to get me out of a rut. One of the rules was this: if I ever had \$10,000—almost a year's salary at the time—I would quit my job and do whatever I wanted to do.

This was the only way I could see to get past the fear. I couldn't imagine how I would get that kind of money, but if some miracle happened, I was sure the security that would come with so much wealth would solve my most pressing and deepest concerns.

It didn't, of course. Over the following years, my career grew, and I saw \$10,000 and more pass through my bank account. More importantly, I became a Christian, and my spiritual life blossomed. I married a wonderful woman, and we raised three sons. I lived a life of outward success and fulfillment. But even then the fear never really went away.

Scarcity moved into my life when I was nine years old, and it didn't move out until much later, through a series of events I'll tell you about in part 4 of this book.

All the money in the world can't cover a deeply embedded sense of scarcity. In fact, researcher and bestselling author Brené Brown says, "Worrying about scarcity is our culture's version of post-traumatic stress. It happens when we've been through too much, and rather than coming together to heal (which requires vulnerability) we're angry and scared and at each other's throats."²

This isn't a problem affecting only the middle class either. The feeling of scarcity impacts every level of society. In a 2015 survey of American millionaires, more than half said they did not feel financially secure. Most reported they worried an unexpected change—a job loss, a market crash, or a failed investment—could affect their lifestyle at any moment. Fifty-two percent said they felt "stuck on a treadmill." At every level of wealth evaluated in the survey, respondents said they need double what they have in order to feel secure.³

Yet a young boy named Jaden, who had almost nothing, found a way through this sense of scarcity. What did a six-year-old boy know that the richest people in the country don't?

Caught between Two Lies

According to theologian Walter Brueggemann, scarcity first emerged in ancient Egypt, in the time of Pharaoh. According to Genesis 41, Pharaoh dreamt there would be a famine in his land, and that made him afraid. His fear encouraged the first recorded application of scarcity into an economy.

Pharaoh began to hoard grain and resources, taking control of what was not originally his.⁴

Fast-forward almost thirty-five hundred years, and government and secular entities are still the primary conduits of scarcity messages. Taxes take what we have. Media fills us with a lust for bigger houses, better clothes, and more possessions. The modern education system tells us our bodies are random mutations of cells, accidents of evolution that live in an arbitrary system that rewards “the survival of the fittest” and eliminates everything else.

During the best periods of human history, the Christian church countered those messages by pointing to a bigger, divinely inspired picture, balancing the narrative. A weekly Sabbath pulled us away from the race for money and reminded us to focus on a loving, powerful, and eternal God. The Scriptures reminded us that there is a higher purpose, and eternal life, waiting for us.

But as the split between the church and the culture grew, the balance slipped. And Christians today are not exempt from a scarcity mentality. They too worry about rising costs and stagnant incomes. Their time also is stretched to the breaking point in the digital age, and they are just as saturated as non-Christians with images and stories highlighting the hurt, brokenness, and lack in the world.

They also have questions.

Can God really meet our needs?

How can we say God loves us if it seems as if he’s not adequately providing for us?

Sure, once upon a time God may have given his people manna to eat. But where is he today? What is he doing for us *now*?

In a complex and challenging world, many of those who trust in Jesus aren't sure what to truly believe. They see the news but not the Savior. They're caught between two devastating lies about God's ability to provide in modern times.

On one side are those who believe the lie that they've been abandoned. Many Christians have shut down and stopped trying to reconcile the idea of a loving God with a difficult world. Feeling left out, unloved, and unprovided for, they leave the church and the God who they think has not kept up his end of the bargain. Today almost 60 percent of those who grew up in the Christian church will leave it—and may give up their faith all together—within the first decade of their adult life.⁵

Even those who stay in the pews often mentally give up on God's promises of provision. They live as functional agnostics, *hoping* God is real but not really *believing* he actually makes a tangible difference in their day-to-day lives. *Sure*, they think, *God can handle the universe, but either he doesn't care or he can't be bothered to help me get a car that doesn't break down.* They trust the laws of economics more than the promises of Jesus and government programs more than God's people. And when those don't work, they're left with only scarcity and isolation.

On the other side of the Christian faith spectrum is another lie, which is just as insidious and damaging. The shiny, shallow promises of what's known as prosperity theology draw the wishful thinking of the disheartened and afraid. Prosperity speakers, including many who call themselves ministers of the gospel, tell believers it is their *right* to be blessed and it is God's *obligation* to provide. They portray him as an omniscient ATM that is accessed by a "positive confession"

of faith. Humans can speak things into existence, and God orbits us. If we do things “right,” then health, wealth, and power will be ours. (If we don’t receive what we want, then we must be doing something wrong. Either way, the prosperity gospel preacher gets to keep our donated money.)

When that attitude of entitlement doesn’t work—and I’m here to tell you it doesn’t—weary Christians are left disillusioned and even disconnected from the God of Scripture.

But what if I told you there’s another way to look at the place where our fear challenges our faith? A path that cuts between the two lies and leads to genuine, future-facing hope? God is not limited, after all, by our false beliefs and costly lies. He has a better way.

Finding the Pattern of Provision

Think about Genesis 1, of God hovering over the deep, speaking things into existence. It boggles my mind that God created hundreds of billions of galaxies, likely more than twenty per person currently living on earth.⁶ God created, with a few simple words, the sun and sky, mountains and meadows, fish and flowers.

And what else did he create? That’s right—us. Out of the dust of the earth, he created humans with five senses and a playground of experiences to explore. Did you know the human tongue contains more than ten thousand taste buds or that they are regenerated and replaced every two weeks, just so we can experience flavor in what we eat? Or that the human eye can see more than ten million colors?

This makes me wonder, *If God, in his generosity, creativity, and abundance, chose to create humans with such*

intricate detail, why do we doubt he has the capacity to care for a single person? Does his provision cover seemingly irrelevant and useless things, like a bunch of stars millions of miles out of reach, but not the very beings he created in his own image?

When we try to argue that God doesn't care or we put him in a box we "control," we ignore the truth about his character. It's a mistake to write off God, believing he doesn't care about the details of either an individual life or the world as a whole. And it's a mistake to try to "control" life without him.

When we don't trust that God wants to provide for both our spiritual and our physical needs, we're left with only those two lies: scarcity thinking or the prosperity gospel. Instead of God's provisions, we turn to government. Instead of Scripture, we look to human ingenuity. Instead of calling on the power of a loving, sovereign God, we rely on ourselves.

We're disappointed when those efforts aren't enough, when we aren't enough. But the truth between the lies is that we were never meant to be enough on our own. God loves us and desperately wants a relationship with us. In fact, he demonstrated that love in full public view—on a cross. He woos us to trust him. He beckons us to draw near to him and he will draw near to us. He promises that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him.

We can understand these statements "draw near" and "diligently seek" as part of the rhythm of our relationship with God. Throughout this book, we will explore this rhythm, this pattern, to access what he has already provided. When we enter this rhythm, we are unlocking his promises, which are a de facto guarantee as he says, "Draw near to me, and I will draw near to you."

However, when we remove God from the world, our resulting false faith in self-sufficiency causes us to misunderstand our own limitations. What will set us free from this culture of not enough isn't more money, more time, or more security.

Getting that \$10,000 I wished for didn't change my life. But I started something else that same year I wrote the "10 Rules of Alexander," and it has grown into a different list—a set of four principles that illustrate the rhythm of our relationship with God and eventually silenced my fear and answered my sense of scarcity.

These four principles are the guarantee of the abundance God was offering all along.

Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may *have it more abundantly*" (John 10:10 NKJV, emphasis added). This path of truth takes us past the two lies of scarcity thinking and faulty prosperity theology. In the following chapters, we will follow this path together toward true abundance—perhaps not the way you have thought about it in the past but the way God promises will fill your every need today.

Hungry People on a Hill

Jesus said we must become like children to enter his kingdom (see Matthew 18:3). Over and over, we hear stories of children like Jaden who, through courage and pure goodness, seem to get closer to the kingdom of God than most disillusioned adults can today.

Jaden's story ultimately reminds me of another boy. This child's name has been lost to history, yet his gift is recorded

not once but four times in the Bible. He too found his way past his own scarcity and into God's abundance.

To understand how important this boy's actions were, though, we need to start with a little bit of context. The story of Jesus's life, ministry, and resurrection is told four times in the New Testament, in four separate Gospels written by four different authors. Each book is full of examples of how Jesus met the physical needs of those around him. Every Gospel contains stories of Jesus healing the blind and welcoming the outcasts. Yet only one miracle, prior to the resurrection, appears in all four books, which underscores its importance.

After hearing of John the Baptist's death, Jesus retreated to a place of solitude. We don't know how long he was alone there, but eventually the disciples went to find him. Jesus's reputation was spreading, and crowds from across the region followed them into the remote wilderness. The Scriptures say Jesus felt compassion for the crowds as he witnessed their need. He set aside his own grief and engaged with the people. He taught them, healed them, and inspired them.

Five thousand men were in attendance that day, and most scholars estimate the entire crowd, including women and children, could have been closer to fifteen thousand people. Seeing such a multitude, Jesus said to the disciples, "Give them something to eat" (Matthew 14:16; Mark 6:37; Luke 9:13).

The book of John goes on to say that Jesus pulled Philip aside and asked, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" (6:5). Philip, standing right next to the Son of God but still trapped in the rules of human economics, answered, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" (v. 7).

An unnamed disciple suggested they send the people away to find food and shelter in the neighboring towns. His message was clear: let someone else take care of the need; we've already done enough. On the surface, the disciple's reaction makes sense. The disciples were grasping for solutions in trying to care for the unexpected crowd. But you can also hear the guardedness, fear, and scarcity mentality in the suggestion. Yes, they had seen Jesus heal an individual person here and there. A lame man walked. A leper's skin cleared up. But this? Thousands of people were pressing in all around them. Fifteen thousand empty bellies were growling. Surely not even Jesus had enough to handle this situation.

Another disciple, Andrew, brought a new twist to the story: he found a boy, the child whose name has been lost to history, with five loaves and two fish. That might have been a generous dinner for one person, or perhaps the child was carrying a meal for his family, but what could so little do for thousands of people? How could something so small possibly be enough?

But the Son of God accepted what he was given without recorded comment. He instructed the crowd to sit. Then he took the food, and he blessed it, broke it, and gave it.

And all the people ate.

The people of first-century Israel, like the people of today, lived with scarcity and fear. For centuries, God's chosen people struggled to survive against oppressive and often murderous enemies. By the time of Jesus's birth, they were ruled by a violent Roman government that denied both their God and their traditions. The Jewish people were heavily taxed and strictly ruled. Famine was often a problem. And so it's even more miraculous that the Gospels tell us they ate that day until they were full. And not only that, but twelve baskets were left over.

All from a single lunch.

No wonder the story is included in each Gospel. That Jesus cared enough about the curious crowds of people to meet their physical needs with abundance illustrates the true nature of his message—in relation not only to the promise of eternal provision in heaven but also to his concern for their practical provision on earth.

The same is true for us today. When we're faced with an antagonistic society, a lack of resources, and a deep sense of insecurity and uncertainty, Jesus's miracle on the hillside offers insight into God's abundant provision.

Throughout this book, we will take a detailed look at what Jesus did that day. We will break his miracle into four distinct actions—what Brueggemann calls the “four decisive verbs of our sacramental existence”⁷—and then see how they reflect the rhythmic relationship between God and his creation. In this relationship, God gives us his provision, which covers us in even the most frightening times of not enough and protects us from the devil's most convincing lies.

Jesus *took* the bread, he *blessed* it, he *broke* it, and he *gave* it. This pattern draws us into a rhythm of relating to our Creator. This rhythm involves our faith and his response to it. In this book, we will walk through this rhythm together. Watch God work and provide for you!

1. He takes (we discover capacity)

When Jesus took the loaves and fish and looked to heaven, he saw potential that no one else saw. Jesus saw not only the need of the people but also the *capacity* of the bread and fish. In part 1 of this book, we will explore how to understand and recognize the capac-

ity God has placed in each of us, in others, and in his creation. We will see how capacity, which is based on God's purposes and glory, teaches us to look beyond our own "potential" to see the eternal and limitless provisions concealed in creation.

2. He blesses (we consecrate, invite him in)

Jesus took the loaves and fish and blessed them, dedicating them to God's higher glory. Jesus consecrated a simple meal and made it something that filled both a physical and a spiritual need. Consecration means "to make something holy or to set apart."⁸ I have heard it described as to imbue with vitality. In part 2, we will explore what it means to consecrate what we have—however big or small it seems to us at the time—to God. We will look at what it means to invite him not just into our spiritual lives but also into our daily lives—our assets, debts, work, families, and even weaknesses. When his holiness, presence, and power come into our one-dimensional lives, something powerful happens.

3. He breaks (he reorders our lives through challenges)

Jesus did not hesitate to physically break the bread and fish after they had been consecrated . . . just as he does not hesitate to metaphorically break us from time to time. A consecrated life is usually not a perfect or easy one. Life throws us into wilderness experiences—death, disease, job loss, family problems. These painful and difficult events lead us to places of seeming loss and scarcity. Yet God resides in the wilderness, just as he resides in the hospitable places. In part 3, I will share some of my own

darkest times so we can see, together, how being broken can reorient us and help us gain perspective. We will see how miracles often follow painful times. Challenges test our deepest faith, but if we are in the wilderness, we are also in the place to find a new perspective on abundance and the provision of eternity.

4. He gives (he provides, often through community)

Jesus gave others the loaves and fish to distribute. The miracle of the boy's lunch could have been stopped in its tracks if the disciples, or the crowd closest to Jesus, had refused to participate. Authentic provision happens when we form communities that represent the body of Christ through serving one another. Jesus meets us as we let go of our own desires and selfishness and instead focus on how to love the people in our lives, even those who seem unlovable. Abundance and selfishness are irreconcilable. In part 4, we will explore how feelings of scarcity appear when we don't see our role as God sees it—in which every sacrifice becomes an investment in the community.

If you have spent much time reading the New Testament, these actions might seem familiar to you. In fact, five stories in the New Testament reflect this same pattern (see sidebar “God's Pattern of Provision: Five New Testament Examples”).

Through four simple and profound actions, Jesus shows us we are cared for. Remembering this can guide us throughout our lives. The remainder of this book is devoted to exploring how these acts interact and reflect the rhythmic nature of our relationship with God, in which we seek him and he always offers his provision.

God's Pattern of Provision: Five New Testament Examples

Sometime after Jesus performed the miracle of the five loaves and two fish, the Gospels of Matthew and Mark record a second, curiously similar situation. Once again, Jesus was in the wilderness, surrounded by crowds. He taught them, healed them, and served their community. Then Matthew 15:32 says Jesus told his disciples, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way."

Now keep in mind this was after these men, Jesus's closest companions, had watched him feed fifteen thousand people with nothing more than a sack lunch. And yet they didn't believe! Verse 33 says they asked, "Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?" a question that's uncomfortably familiar. Lord, why do you again ask us to do the impossible?

Sometimes our doubts are bigger than our memories.

Jesus responded, of course, with provision and love. He took what food was available—in this case, seven loaves and "a few small fish"—and gave thanks, broke, and shared. Again, there were baskets full of leftovers.

The third story is Jesus's last supper with his disciples (see Matthew 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:19–20). As the hour of his death neared, Jesus took the bread and the wine. He gave thanks and blessed them. He broke the bread and shared it with his closest friends. His previous miracles provided physical abundance, but his actions here filled the disciples' spiritual needs and prepared them emotionally for the coming trials. And there were trials. An arrest. A crucifixion. A burial. And then an empty tomb.

The fourth story is recorded in Luke 24. As two of Jesus's followers walked glumly away from Jerusalem on the morning

of the third day after his death, Jesus himself came and walked with them. The believers did not recognize him, though, even as he unpacked the words of the prophets and explained why the Messiah had to suffer. It was only when they gathered for a meal that the miracle happened. “When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight” (vv. 30–31).

If that isn’t enough, God gives us one more example of how four seemingly normal actions reflect his abundant provision. In Acts 27, we read how the apostle Paul was a prisoner of the Roman government, packed onto a boat for the dangerous crossing to Rome for trial. The voyage went horribly wrong, and the ship was caught in a storm that lasted for more than fourteen days. The crew was terrified, but Paul assured them they would live. An angel had visited him in a dream and told him so. He encouraged them to eat, and “after he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat” (v. 35). The next morning they ran the ship aground on a sandy beach and were saved.

With such a long tradition, it’s no surprise that today most Christian churches repeat all four steps Jesus took during the Last Supper in their practice of communion, in memory of Jesus’s death and resurrection. It is a means of grace and a preview of the time when we will actually eat and drink at the banquet table in heaven.

Surely something that is repeated in Scripture five times is worth paying attention to. This is the four-step pattern of provision that inspired the book. Each time, God provided physically or spiritually, offered a deeper knowledge of himself, or rescued someone. Every step is rooted in God’s promises. It is why I call this book *The God Guarantee*.