

September 6, 2026

Text: Psalm 126

Subject/Title: A Psalm for the In-Between

Central Theme: The Lord Has Provided, Is Providing, And Will Provide!

Rational:

1) The Past Provision (vv. 1-3)

- a) Return from Babylon
- b) God's blessing should point back to him (see v. 2)
- c) Why look back? Anxiety thrives when we struggle with spiritual amnesia.

2) The Present Plea (v. 4)

- a) The Israelites are back in their land, but the work is hard.
- b) It is okay to admit that we are drained and to ask God to pour us fresh water.
- c) This is how I feel while writing this sermon, preparing for a move with no place to live and no full-time income...

3) The Future Harvest (vv. 5-6)

- a) Tears we shed in faith are not wasted
- b) Obedience often requires us to leave what is comfortable
- c)

Illustration:

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Shoot for 4100 words

Intro: 5 Minutes

Good morning, Church family. It is so incredibly good to be here with you today. This has been our home, and looking out at all of you, it is hard to put into words exactly what this church family has meant to Makenzie and I over the past 4 years of our lives.

I just graduated from seminary this past May. That was a massive milestone for our family, and we are so deeply grateful for how the Lord and this church have sustained us through it all. But graduation is not the end of our story...

When I started seminary, I had a general plan for my life. We thought that the Lord was going to move us out of the country into foreign mission work. Moving to Chicago, which we have been telling people is just short 2 hours away with a direct flight, was nowhere on my radar. But God has a way of completely interrupting our perfectly laid plans. As many of you know, Makenzie and I, along with Hannah Ankers, are moving to Chicago this week to help Sam & Emily

Copeland launch Garden City Church. We are excited to see where the Lord brings us and how he might use us in the great city of Chicago!

We are incredibly excited. We are expecting to see what God is going to do. But if I am being completely honest with you all this morning, there is also a very real tension in our hearts right now.

If you have ever graduated from a program, sent your youngest child off to college, or stepped into retirement, you know the strange tension of crossing a major finish line. You work for years toward a massive goal. The day finally comes, you celebrate with family, and you feel on top of the world. It feels completely surreal, almost like a dream. But then you wake up a few days later. The celebration is over. The highly structured schedule you lived by for years is completely gone. You suddenly realize there is hard work in actually building a life in that new reality.

Right now, my family is living in that exact tension. We had the huge victory of graduating, but this morning, Makenzie's parents' nice basement that we have been able to live in recently is full of cardboard boxes. We are preparing to leave the familiar behind, saying goodbye to the home church we love so much, saying goodbye to all of our family, and stepping into the unpredictable, exhausting work of building a life and a ministry in a brand new city.

That whiplash between a massive victory and a daunting new reality is exactly what we see in the passage we are looking at today.

This summer we have been in the Songs of Ascents Psalms. As you have heard if you have been with us the past weeks, these were the songs the pilgrims sang as they traveled up the road to worship in Jerusalem. Psalm 126 was written right after the Israelites returned from seventy long years of exile in Babylon. They had just crossed their massive finish line. God set them free. It was such a miracle they said it felt like a dream.

But here is the catch. When they finally got back to Jerusalem, the city was in ruins. The fields were dry. The waiting in Babylon was over, but the exhausting, backbreaking work of rebuilding a broken city was staring them right in the face. This psalm captures the tension of the in-between. It is a song for when your past deliverance meets your present struggle.

The core truth we are holding onto this morning is both simple and deeply profound: **The Lord Has Provided, Is Providing, And Will Provide!** Drawing from this Psalm, we are going to look at three intentional movements the psalmist makes to navigate the heavy tension of his in-between season. These are the same movements we must apply to our own hearts when we feel suspended between the great victories of our past and the daunting anxieties of our future.

Body: 20 Minutes

Point 1: The Past Provision (Verses 1-3)

The very first movement the psalmist makes to navigate this difficult in-between season is The Past Provision. He starts by remembering what God has already provided. Look back at verses 1 through 3 with me.

"When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them.' The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad."

We have to put ourselves in the shoes of the ancient Israelites for a moment to truly understand the weight of these words. They had been trapped in Babylon for seventy years. Try to wrap your mind around that timeline. Seventy years is an entire lifetime. A whole generation of Israelites was born, grew old, and died only knowing captivity, having never once seen their homeland. They lived as second-class citizens in a foreign empire, surrounded by foreign gods, foreign language, and foreign customs.

Psalms 137, which we will get to in 2 summers, tells us that they used to sit by the rivers of Babylon and weep when they remembered Zion. They hung up their harps on the willow trees because their captors demanded songs of joy, but they could not bring themselves to sing the Lord's song in a foreign land. For decades, the promise of freedom probably felt like a cruel joke. It felt entirely impossible. They were a defeated people.

But then, God moved. Through King Cyrus's decree, the impossible happened. And when God provided this rescue, He did it so completely and so suddenly that it left the people absolutely staggered. The psalmist says they were like those who dream. The deliverance happened so fast it felt like a mirage.

It was just too good to be true.

But my absolute favorite part of this Psalm is what happens next. The joy and the shock were not just contained to the Israelites. The deliverance was so massive and so undeniable that even the surrounding pagan nations had to stop and pay attention.

These foreign nations did not worship God. They served idols of wood and stone. But they looked at this group of captive refugees suddenly walking free, walking back to their homeland with their heads held high, and they could not deny the miracle. They pointed at the Israelites and said, "The Lord has done great things for them."

This highlights a massive truth for us today. God's blessing should always point back to Him. When the Lord provides, it is never just for our own comfort. It is so that the world watching us can see His glory. The liberty granted to Israel was brought about in such an extraordinary way that the other nations had to confess the hand of God was in it. When God blesses your family,

when He sustains you through a trial, when He provides a way out of an impossible situation, it is meant to be a billboard for His goodness.

The psalmist hears the pagan nations say this, and he completely agrees. He catches their reluctant praise and turns it into a personal, triumphant declaration of faith. He says, "Yes. The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad."

Wait a moment

This brings us to a crucial reality for our own lives today. Our church here is beautifully diverse. We have people from different economic backgrounds, different ages, and different ethnicities. Some of you are in high school, and some of you have been retired for twenty years. But no matter who you are or what your background is, you will face seasons of transition. You will face moments where you are standing in the rubble of a difficult situation.

When you are staring at a house full of moving boxes, or looking at a medical diagnosis you did not expect, or facing a financial crisis, and feeling entirely overwhelmed by the future, look back at what God has done in your life or in the lives of others.

Why must we remember what God has done already? Because **anxiety thrives when we struggle with spiritual amnesia**. When we forget what God has provided in the past, we panic about what He might do in the future. We trick ourselves into thinking that this new obstacle is the one that will finally defeat Him.

The Israelites had a massive, terrifying rebuilding project in front of them in Jerusalem. The walls were broken down, the gates were burned with fire, and the temple was destroyed. If they only looked at the ruined walls and the dry dirt in front of them, they would have given up. They would have packed up and gone back to Babylon. So the psalmist makes them to turn around and look at their own history. He has them look at the massive deliverance God had already accomplished. He reminds them that the God who split the Red Sea and the God who broke the chains of Babylon is the exact same God standing with them in the rubble.

We have to do the same thing. We have to look back. We look back at the cross of Jesus Christ. We remember that the God of the universe stepped into human history, lived the perfect life we could not live, and died the death we deserved. We remember that He completely conquered the grave to set us free from the ultimate captivity of sin and death.

If God has already rescued you from your deepest valley, you can absolutely trust Him with the unknowns of your present reality. If He can conquer death, He can handle your finances. He can handle your medical diagnosis. He can handle your prodigal child. He can handle your broken relationship. And He can certainly handle a move to Chicago.

When the fear of the future tries to paralyze you, you have to fight back with the memory of His past provision. You have to look at your own life, look at the cross, and boldly declare exactly what the psalmist declared. The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad.

Point 2: The Present Plea (Verse 4)

Alright, the second movement the psalmist makes is found in verse 4. He transitions from remembering the past provision to crying out with **The Present Plea**.

Depending on the translation of the Bible you hold in your hands this morning, you might read something slightly different right here. If you are reading out of the King James Version, or the New King James Version, your text says, 'Bring back our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the South.' But if you look at the English Standard Version, the ESV, which I am reading from today, it says, 'Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negeb!'

Both translations are wonderful. The King James Version is a faithful translation, and it translates the original Hebrew words very literally. The literal Hebrew words do talk about turning captivity. But the ESV actually captures something incredibly helpful about how those words were used by the people of that day.

In ancient Hebrew, that phrase was a common idiom. An idiom is just a figure of speech. For example, when we say it is raining cats and dogs outside, we do not mean literal animals are falling from the sky. We simply mean it is raining heavily. In the exact same way, the ancient Hebrew people used the phrase 'turn our captivity' as a well-known idiom to mean 'restore our fortunes' or 'make our lives whole again.'

This makes perfect sense when we look at the context of the psalm. It resolves what almost sounds like a contradiction. Think about it for a moment. The Israelites are already free from Babylon. They are already standing in Jerusalem. The physical rescue is over. So they are not praying for God to bring back their physical captivity or free them from a literal prison cell. The prison doors are already open.

The problem is that the initial rescue was only part of the story. The Israelites are back home, but the land is completely ruined. The walls are torn down. The soil is dry. The people are exhausted. The adrenaline of the big rescue has faded, and now the harsh, daily reality of rebuilding is crushing them. They are suspended between the miracle of the past and the struggle of the present. They need God to provide right now.

So they pray a very specific prayer. They ask God to restore their fortunes like the streams in the Negeb.

The Negeb, or the South, is a barren, arid desert in southern Judah. It is bone dry almost the entire year. If you look at it during the summer months, it just looks like cracked dirt, harsh rocks, and deep ravines. It looks completely dead and inhospitable.

But when the winter rains finally fall in the distant mountains miles and miles away, the water rushes down through those dry, rocky ravines. It gathers speed and force, creating sudden and incredibly powerful flash floods. These streams of water roar through the desert without warning. And when they do, the transformation is miraculous. Almost overnight, the barren desert blooms with life. Green grass and shrubs spring up where there was only dust just hours before. The dead landscape is completely transformed by the sudden rush of water.

The psalmist is praying for exactly that kind of transformation. The people are asking for a sudden, powerful, unearned flood of God's present grace to wash over their dry circumstances.

Our spiritual lives can look exactly like that desert with no water.

Some of you in this room today know exactly what I mean. You know you are saved. You know God loves you. You know He has provided great things for you in the past. But your daily life feels like the cracked dirt of a failed garden or the rocks of the Negeb desert. You are depleted. You are physically, emotionally, and spiritually exhausted. You look at your marriage, your parenting, your job, or your own personal walk with the Lord, and all you see is dry dirt and cracked rocks.

I want you to hear this clearly this morning. It is completely okay to admit that we are drained. It is okay to admit that we are exhausted, scared, and empty. You do not have to walk into this church building, put on a fake smile, and pretend everything is perfectly fine. The Israelites did not pretend Jerusalem was beautiful when it was actually in ruins. They looked at the rubble, they felt the dryness of the land, and they cried out to God for help.

When we are brittle and dry, God does not always need months to revive us. We can boldly go to God's throne and ask Him to pour fresh water into our dry seasons. It is okay to ask God to provide exactly what we need for today. We can pray for the streams in the Negeb. One sudden downpour of His presence, one sudden shift in our perspective through the power of the Holy Spirit, can bring us right back to life.

If you are in a dry season today, if you are feeling the crushing weight of the in-between, do not stop praying. Do not stop asking God to send the rain. Welcome Him into your need today and ask Him to flood your dry heart with His peace. Ask Him to restore your fortunes like the streams in the Negeb. He is providing for us right now, even in the waiting.

Point 3: The Future Harvest (Verses 5-6)

And lastly, we see the third movement the psalmist makes. He moves from the sudden miracle of the flash flood to the slow, agonizing, daily work of farming, looking toward The Future Harvest. Look at verses 5 and 6 with me.

“Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy! He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.”

There is a very sharp, intentional contrast here in the text. In verse 4, the psalmist asks for a sudden flood. A flash flood does all the work for you. You just stand back and watch the water bring the desert to life. It is entirely out of your control. It is a sheer gift from heaven.

But in verses 5 and 6, the picture changes entirely. Farming is not sudden. Farming is incredibly slow, and it requires backbreaking, exhausting human effort. The psalmist is admitting a profound truth about the Christian life. Sometimes, God brings a sudden, overnight breakthrough. He heals the sickness instantly, He provides the unexpected check in the mail right on time, and He restores the broken relationship overnight.

But most of the time, renewal is slow. Most of the time, we are called to be farmers. God will provide the future harvest, but He asks us to do the planting.

Think about an ancient farmer in the Middle East walking through a barren field. He has a small bag of precious seed slung over his shoulder. In times of famine or drought, that seed is literally his food. It is his family's survival. He could easily take that seed back into his house, grind it into flour, and bake bread for his hungry children that very night.

Instead, he walks out into the hot sun. He cuts open the dry ground, and he throws that precious grain into the dirt. To an outside observer, it might look like he is just throwing his livelihood away. It is painful work. The text paints a vivid picture of a farmer who is literally crying as he works. He drops a seed and a tear. He drops another seed and another tear. He is exhausted. His body aches. He is hungry. He does not know for sure what the weather will do. He does not know if a drought will come or if a swarm of lanternflies will eat the crop. But he keeps walking, and he keeps planting, seed by seed, tear by tear.

Why? Why would he endure that kind of pain? Why would he give up the comfort of eating the seed today?

Because of the promise. The text says **He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him**. He gives up the temporary satisfaction of eating the seed today because he trusts the massive harvest that God will provide tomorrow.

Any parent in the room knows the reality of the 3:00 a.m. infant wake-up call. When Makenzie and I brought Cephas home, we quickly learned what it means to be completely and utterly exhausted. You know the feeling. Your eyes are burning, your body aches with fatigue, and the house is completely dark and silent. There are times when you hear the monitor go off in the middle of the night, and you are quite literally shedding tears of sheer exhaustion as you pull yourself out from under the covers. You just want to sleep.

But you still get out of bed. You still walk the floor. You still rock that baby in the dark.

Why? Because you are investing in a human life. You know that the exhaustion of the long night is simply the seed you have to plant to get the harvest of watching your child grow, laugh, learn to walk, and eventually thrive. Investing in the future harvest is entirely worth the work. Sowing in tears is just doing the hard, exhausting work today because you trust the immense joy that is coming tomorrow.

Obedience to God often requires us to leave what is comfortable. It requires us to plant seeds in the dark.

Uprooting our lives and moving to Chicago to help plant a church is daunting. Leaving Cave Spring, leaving our family, leaving the people we love so much, and stepping out without a home or an income is profoundly uncomfortable. There is a very real grief in leaving the familiar behind. It hurts to say goodbye. The soil of new beginnings is almost always watered with tears.

The pain of the planting is temporary, but the joy of the harvest is eternal.

Closing: 5 Minutes

This Psalm, written thousands of years ago by returning exiles, points us directly to the beauty of the Gospel. It points us directly to the person and the work of Jesus Christ. He is the ultimate proof that the Lord provides.

Think about the ultimate seed that was planted in the dark ground for our sake. Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, left the absolute comfort and glory of heaven to come to this broken, dry, rebellious earth. He was a man of sorrows, deeply acquainted with grief. He knew what it meant to weep. He wept over the city of Jerusalem. He wept at the tomb of His friend Lazarus.

And in the Garden of Gethsemane, on the night before He was crucified, He sweat drops of blood and wept tears of agony as He prepared to go to the cross. He knew the immense cost of the seed He was about to plant. He knew the pain of the wrath of God that He was about to bear on our behalf.

Jesus sowed in tears. He allowed His own body to be beaten, broken, and nailed to a wooden cross. He took the massive weight of our sin, our shame, our guilt, and our anxiety upon Himself. He died a brutal death in our place, taking the punishment we rightfully deserved. And He allowed His lifeless body to be buried in the dark soil of a tomb, like a single grain of wheat falling into the earth to die.

But three days later, the harvest came. Jesus completely conquered the grave. He rose from the dead with shouts of joy, defeating sin and death forever, and bringing eternal salvation to all who trust in Him. He is the ultimate fulfillment of this Psalm.

Because He went forth weeping, we can come home rejoicing.

Wait a moment

As Makenzie and I pack our boxes this week and head to Chicago, we are taking this incredible promise with us. We know there will be hard days, and we know there will be tears. But we also know the God of the harvest. The Lord has provided, He is providing, and He will provide.

And my prayer for this church, my home church, the people who helped raise me and train me, is that you will hold firmly onto this promise too. Look back at what God has done. Remember the cross. Pray boldly for the sudden rain in your dry seasons. And keep planting the seeds, even when you are weeping.

The harvest is coming.

That is all I have for us today. Again, thank you so much for all you do and for being such an important part of our lives. Please pray for us and our family of 4 as we move to Chicago this week, and that we can be effective in seeing many come to Christ.

Thank you.