

Grumbling in the Wilderness

Message 5 of 8 in the series: "Exodus"

- A. Through a series of miracles, the Lord rescued the Israelites from 400 years of slavery, loaded them down with riches, and destroyed the Egyptian army that pursued them. Yet, three days into their journey towards the Promised Land, the Israelites grumbled when they got thirsty.

Grumble = to murmur, complain in a low and indistinct tone.

"Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.) **So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, 'What are we to drink?'**" Exodus 15:22-24 (NIV)

IMPORTANT! Grumbling is always wrong because it poisons our attitudes, discourages others, and is detrimental to our Christian witness. **"Do everything without grumbling or arguing**, so that you may become blameless and pure, 'children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.' **Then you will shine** among them like stars in the sky." Philippians 2:14-16 (NIV)

IMPORTANT! God used the ugly situation at Marah as a teachable moment to instruct His people about the importance of listening and obeying. "So, Moses cried out to the Lord for help, and **the Lord showed him a piece of wood**. Moses threw it into the water, and this made the water good to drink. It was there at Marah that the Lord set before them the following decree as **a standard to test their faithfulness to him**. **He said, 'If you will listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his sight, obeying his commands** and keeping all his decrees, then I will not make you suffer any of the diseases I sent on the Egyptians; for I am the Lord who heals you.'" Exodus 15:25-26 (NLT)

- B. A month later, the Israelites grumbled again when they got hungry.

"The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. In the desert **the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron**. The Israelites said to them, **'If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.'** Then the Lord said to Moses, 'I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. **In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions**. On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.' So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, 'In the evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt, and **in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your grumbling against him**. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?'" Exodus 16:1-7 (NIV)

IMPORTANT! Grumbling is an expression of unbelief in the goodness/guidance/power of God. "Be careful then, dear brothers and sisters. **Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God**. You must warn each other every day, while it is still 'today,' so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God. For if we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as firmly as when we first believed, we will share in all that belongs to Christ. Remember what it says: **'Today when you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled.'** **And who was it who rebelled against God, even though they heard his voice? Wasn't it the people Moses led out of Egypt?'**" Hebrews 3:12-16 (NLT) (*Psalm 95:7-8*)

"That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, **'What is it?'** For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, **'It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat**. This is what the Lord has commanded: "Everyone is to gather as much as they need. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.'" The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. And when they measured it by the omer, the one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little. **Everyone had gathered just as much as they needed**. Then Moses said to them, 'No one is to keep any of it until morning.' However, **some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell**. So, Moses was angry with them. Each morning everyone gathered as much as they needed, and when the sun grew hot, it melted away. On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much—two omers for each person... So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. 'Eat it today,' Moses said, 'because today is a sabbath

to the Lord. You will not find any of it on the ground today...’ Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. Then the Lord said to Moses, **‘How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions?’** ...**The people of Israel called the bread manna.** It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey... **The Israelites ate manna forty years,** until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan.” Exodus 16:13-22a, 24-25, 27-28, 31, & 35 (NIV)

IMPORTANT! God fed the Israelites with manna in order to test whether or not they would follow His instructions and trust Him to provide for their needs every day. “Remember how the Lord your God led you through the wilderness for these forty years, humbling you and testing you to prove your character, and to find out whether or not you would obey his commands. Yes, he humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with manna, a food previously unknown to you and your ancestors. **He did it to teach you that people do not live by bread alone; rather, we live by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.**” Deuteronomy 8:2-3 (NLT)

IMPORTANT! Jesus understands better than we do how hard it can be for us to trust God’s guidance and timing when we face trials. “Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry. During that time the devil came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread.’ But Jesus told him, ‘No! The Scriptures say, **“People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”**’” Matthew 4:1-4 (NLT)

IMPORTANT! Jesus instructed His disciples to pray about listening, obeying, and trusting God to provide for their daily needs. “Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. **Your will be done. On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.** And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” Matthew 6:9b-13 (NKJV)

C. Sadly, the Israelites grumbled again as soon as they got thirsty again.

“The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. So they quarreled with Moses and said, ‘Give us water to drink.’ Moses replied, ‘Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the Lord to the test?’ **But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, ‘Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?’** Then Moses cried out to the Lord, ‘What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.’ The Lord answered Moses, ‘Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink.’ So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the Lord saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’” Exodus 17:1-7 (NIV)

IMPORTANT! Thanksgiving and praise are powerful antidotes to grumbling when we face hardship or difficulty. **“Come, let us worship and bow down.** Let us kneel before the Lord our maker, for he is our God. We are the people he watches over, the flock under his care. If only you would listen to his voice today! The Lord says, **‘Don’t harden your hearts as Israel did at Meribah, as they did at Massah in the wilderness. For there your ancestors tested and tried my patience, even though they saw everything I did.’**” Psalm 95:6-9 (NLT)

Good News! The Holy Spirit will give us love, joy, peace, patience, and the power to quit grumbling if we surrender to the Lord our understanding of how things ought to be. “For God is working in you, giving you **the desire and the power** to do what pleases him.” Philippians 2:13 (NLT) (*Galatians 5:22-23*)

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Connect Group Questions:

1. Read Exodus 15:22-26, 16:1-4, & 17:1-6 & Philippians 2:14-16. How does grumbling poison our minds, discourage others, and negatively impact our Christian witness?
2. What do the following passages teach us about contentment? (Hebrews 13:5, 1 Timothy 6:6-11) Why do you think it is much easier for most of us to grumble than to be content?

3. Read Hebrews 3:12-16 & Psalm 95:7-8. Why do you think God views our grumbling about others, our circumstances, or our difficulties as unbelief in His goodness, guidance, and power? (See James 1:2-4)
4. Read Psalm 95:1-9, Galatians 5:22-23, & Philippians 2:13. Is it really true that praise and thanksgiving are antidotes to grumbling? If so, ask everyone in your group to share at least one thing for which they are grateful. Then spend time in prayer as a group thanking God for His many blessings and ask Him to give everyone in our church love, joy, peace, patience, and the ability to surrender our understanding of how things ought to be.
5. Read Deuteronomy 8:2-3 & Matthew 4:1-4 & 6:9-13. Why did God deliver manna daily instead of sending Gabriel with a heavenly bread truck once a week? What is the significance of asking God to give us our daily bread? What did Jesus mean when He said we don't live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God?

6. Discuss the following quotations:

“Home is the place we love best and grumble the most.” Billy Sunday

“The remarkable thing is, we have a choice everyday regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day.”
Chuck Swindoll

“He rained down manna for them to eat; he gave them bread from heaven. They ate the food of angels! God gave them all they could hold.” Psalm 78:24-25 (NLT)