

# FAILURE IN THE WILDERNESS

**+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

The Lord provides for His people even when they are undeserving.

**+ BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Exodus 15:22–17:16

**+ SETTING:**

God brought His people out of the slavery of Egypt and through the Red Sea by His mighty hand, simultaneously crushing the Egyptian army. This omnipotent God displayed His goodness by saving Israel in keeping with His covenant to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Now on the other side of the Red Sea, they were in the wilderness, and they quickly found themselves in need of resources. Israel was tested as their water and food supplies ran low. Israel would need to trust in the God who saved them, but they were also tempted to grumble against that same God.

# DAY 1

## READ:

**Exodus 15:22–16:8**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Exodus 16:1-8**

## NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Discontent is a sin that is its own punishment and makes men torment themselves; it makes the spirit sad, the body sick, and all the enjoyments sour; it is the heaviness of the heart and the rottenness of the bones. It is a sin that is its own parent. It arises not from the condition, but from the mind. As we find Paul contented in a prison, so Ahab discontent in a palace.”<sup>1</sup>

—Matthew Henry (1662-1714)

“There’s nothing to eat!” At some point, every parent of hungry teenagers hears this cry. The pantry and the refrigerator may be well stocked with good food, but the cravings of a hungry teenage stomach seem to reverberate with these words: “I want what I want! Now feed me!”

The Israelites’ complaint about a lack of food questioned the goodness of God. Surprisingly, they reminisced about the good old days, imagining Pharaoh’s slave buffet supplying good meat and endless bread. What they had forgotten was their groans and cries to the Lord because of the oppression and slavery they experienced. So they directed their complaints against their leaders: Moses and Aaron.

How often we complain against the Lord. We look at our circumstances and confuse our needs and our wants. We judge the goodness of God by how our life is going. If troubles and hardships arise, we are tempted to question the love that God has for us.

Our tendency is to take out our dissatisfaction and discontentment on someone who is close to us. Like Israel’s complaints against Aaron and Moses, our complaints toward others express our displeasure about any trial and testing. We forget that the Lord is working to strengthen our dependence upon Him. In reality, what we are looking for can only be satisfied by His good and gracious hand. When we know that God is working for our eternal joy and that it is found only in Him, we can understand the apostle Paul’s instructions to rejoice always, pray constantly, and give thanks in everything (1 Thess. 5:16-18).

**Why do we need to be reminded that all of our grumbling is ultimately directed against God?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

Exodus 16:9-20

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 16:16-20

## NOTES

Sometimes it is a struggle to part with belongings, even when they are long past their usefulness. Some people hang on to clothes that don't fit them in the hope that one day they will be able to wear them again. Others have collections that at one time were meaningful but have long since been forgotten in storage.

A few recent television shows have brought an awareness to some of the most extreme forms of hoarding—homes that are stuffed and overflowing with possessions, collections, and belongings, not to mention the trash and filth. The desire to keep something because it might be useful in the future, carries an emotional significance, or provides the feeling of safety by having future supplies can become paralyzing to one's well-being.

When the children of Israel were instructed to collect enough food for the day, they were learning that God was powerful and sufficient to provide for their daily needs. God had promised that He would rain down bread from heaven and supply their daily needs (Ex. 16:4; Ps. 78:24-25). But if they attempted to keep some bread beyond the allotted time, the food would spoil and become inedible (16:19-20).

It is wise to plan for the future (see Prov. 6:6-11). But our planning should never replace our trust in our good and sufficient God to meet all of our daily needs.

Furthermore, the Lord has reminded us that we are to share what we have with those who are in need (2 Cor. 8:14-15). A generous heart reminds us that every good and perfect gift is from our unchanging Lord (Jas. 1:17). By sharing with those who are in need, we show that our trust is in the Lord, not our belongings. Giving fosters contentment with what we have because God has never left us nor forsaken us (Heb. 13:5-6).

**How does generosity cultivate a heart of trust in the Lord?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

**Exodus 16:21-36**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Exodus 16:22-30**

## NOTES



### **ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #21: GOD IS OMNIPOTENT**

God is all-powerful. There is nothing God cannot do so long as it does not contradict His own nature or law. God has power and authority over the universe He created, from the largest solar system to the smallest particle. Affirming that God is all-powerful does not mean that God can sin—since that would go against His perfect moral nature. As Christians, we rest in the belief that the God who has all power is good, and we gain great comfort by knowing that an all-powerful God is working for our good and joy.

When Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone, made his first call in 1876, his assistant, Mr. Watson, answered the phone to hear Graham exclaim, “Mr. Watson, come here—I want to see you.”<sup>2</sup> With the further development of smart phones and mobile technology, the pressure to be available, ready, and active every moment of every day is only a buzz or ring away.

If ever there has been a time when we need the gift of God’s rest, it is today. Ask someone how they are doing and you’ll likely hear them say, “I’m so busy.” Our schedules are filled, and our lives are stressed to exhaustion. Christians struggle to find time to pray, to read God’s Word, and to serve others. We say we are overloaded, yet the taskmaster in our pocket keeps us from resting from our work.

When Israel left Egypt, God had freed them from the moment-by-moment pressure to work. Through His act of creation, God had given work and rest as gifts, but in Egypt, the people had only known the endless strain of labor. Now freed from this daily tyranny, Israel was called to work six days and trust the Lord’s provision for the seventh so that they might enjoy rest. Yet some struggled to cease from their work, doubting that God would provide for them in the wilderness with a double portion on the sixth day of the week (16:27-30).

The gift of rest is received by faith. The temptation to keep going and finish one more job may be strong, but the Lord calls us to remember His salvation and rest in His good and generous provision. His gift of rest will never come at your expense but will come with His renewing presence.

**What temptations keep you from resting from your work and enjoying the salvation of the Lord?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

Exodus 17

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 17:1-7

## NOTES

When the circumstances of life go wrong or when life doesn't meet our expectations, humans are very quick to blame God and demand that He fix things. If God's response doesn't measure up to our approval, humans are prone to justify their unbelief, their bitterness, and their resentment.

In Exodus 17, the children of Israel put God on trial in their hearts. They accused Moses of following God's leading to bring the entire nation out into the wilderness to die. Moses reminded the people that they were testing God and that this action was sinful.

Yet God is abundantly gracious. God didn't interrupt the conflict between Moses and the people with raw, angry power. Instead, He acted with abundant, gracious provision, letting water flow for the millions of men, women, children, and livestock. His heart was full of compassion to deliver His people from their trouble even when they multiplied their troubles with false accusations against God.

God provided for His people by taking the blow of judgment. Standing between Moses and the rock, the Lord took the blow from the staff and let streams of abundant water flow in the desert (see Ps. 78:15-16). And in the same way, Christ is the One who takes the blow of judgment for us, receiving all of the accusations we heap upon Him, bearing our sin in His body, so that by His wounds our souls may be healed (see Isa. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24).

**What does the death of Christ teach you about the way the Lord deals with your accusations against Him?**

# DAY 5

## READ:

**Psalm 103**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Psalm 103:6-14**

## NOTES

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”<sup>3</sup>

This powerful comment opens A. W. Tozer’s classic book *The Knowledge of the Holy*. Tozer explains that our view of God—what we believe God is like in the deepest part of our hearts—is the belief that shapes the direction of our lives.

What do we believe God is like? Is He a reluctant God who forgives because that’s what He is supposed to do? Or does He love to lavish His mercy and grace upon the repentant to display the extravagant riches of His grace in kindness toward those who believe (Eph. 2:4-7)?

When reflecting upon the wayward, grumbling hearts of the Israelites, it may appear like God’s hand had been forced. The people demanded water. They grumbled about God’s leaders (Ex. 17:2-3). And God responded. Each time Israel cried out, whether from oppression or complaining, God acted as a merciful father to his son (see 4:22).

A son may describe many details about his father—his job, his hobbies, his physical appearance, his favorite food. But what does a son say is the character of his father toward him as a son? It is one thing to describe the appearance and the tasks of a father. It takes the depth of the relationship to see the intentions of a father’s heart for his son.

Knowing the doctrine of God is vital and good. What is crucial is to know the intentions of God’s heart, which overflows in mercy so that His children might know Him and enjoy Him forever.

**What attribute of God is the first one to come into your mind? How does that affect the way you live?**



# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"My dear Christian reader, will you not try this way? Will you not know for yourself, if as yet you have not known it, the preciousness and the happiness of this way of casting all your cares and burdens and necessities upon God? This way is as open to you as to me ... every one is invited and commanded to trust in the Lord, to trust in Him with all his heart, and to cast his burden upon Him, and to call upon Him in the day of trouble. Will you not do this, my dear brethren in Christ?"<sup>4</sup>

-George Müller (1805-1898)

## POINT 1: The Lord's provision tests His people's obedience (Ex. 16:2-5).

The root of all grumbling, whether against God or others, is a \_\_\_\_\_ of the truth that the Lord is \_\_\_\_\_, blaming Him for our circumstances.



**Why is the root of all grumbling ultimately a complaint about God?**

The trials in our lives \_\_\_\_\_ us and \_\_\_\_\_ us to trust God's Word and to find satisfaction and \_\_\_\_\_ in His provision, not our resourcefulness.



**Why does obedience to God matter so much?**

## POINT 2: The Lord's provision continues despite His people's failings (Ex. 16:13-20,27-30).

## ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #21: GOD IS OMNIPOTENT

God is all-powerful. There is nothing God cannot do so long as it does not contradict His own nature or law. God has \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ over the universe He created, from the largest solar system to the smallest particle. Affirming that God is all-powerful does not mean that God can sin—since that would go against His perfect moral nature. As Christians, we \_\_\_\_\_ in the belief that the God who has all power is good, and we gain great comfort by knowing that an all-powerful God is working for our \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.



**How have you experienced God's undeserved faithfulness?**

**POINT 3: The Lord's provision is gracious in response to His people's demands**  
(Ex. 17:2-7).

In their complaining to \_\_\_\_\_, the Israelites were putting \_\_\_\_\_ on trial. They failed God's test by testing God, who is always holy and \_\_\_\_\_.



**What do we reveal about our hearts in our complaints?**

God's \_\_\_\_\_ comes to His people through \_\_\_\_\_. As Moses struck the rock upon which God stood, God was symbolically taking the punishment that the people deserved so that they could live. This is what \_\_\_\_\_ did for us.

## MY RESPONSE

Because we have experienced God's grace through the striking of His Son, we receive God's faithful provision for our daily needs with gratitude as we testify of His kindness to others so that they too may come to trust in Him.

- **HEAD:** What reasons do you have for trusting in God even when your circumstances tempt you to grumble?
- **HEART:** How does your attitude toward God need to change so you will worship Him instead of complain?
- **HANDS:** With whom will you share the Lord's kindness through practical service and the good news of our gracious Savior, Jesus Christ?

NOTES

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Are not you amazed sometimes that you should have so much as a hope, that poor and needy as you are, the Lord thinketh of you? But let not all you feel discourage you; for if our Physician is almighty, our disease cannot be desperate; and if he casts none out that come to him, why should you fear? Our sins are many, but his mercies are more: our sins are great, but his righteousness is greater: we are weak, but he is power."<sup>5</sup>

-John Newton (1725-1807)