

The Gospel Project® for Adults

Daily Discipleship Guide CSB, Unit 5, Session 1

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A Test in the Wilderness

Session in a Sentence: God is gracious to provide for His people, even when we fail to obey Him.

Main Passages: Exodus 16:2-4,13-20; 17:3-6; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4

The exodus story thus far:

- God showed His power in miracle after miracle in the plagues and delivered His people out of Egypt.
- God delivered His people through the Red Sea and caused Pharaoh's army to be swallowed up by the same sea.
- Safe and secure in the presence of the Lord on the other side of the sea, the Israelites expressed their worship through singing.
- The Israelites followed God's leadership through Moses for three days in the wilderness and could not find water, and they began grumbling. When their throats became dry, their memories became short.

When have you forgotten, or almost forgotten, God's goodness because of a difficult situation in your life?

Group Time

Point 1: God provides for His people in their time of need (Ex. 16:2-4).

2 The entire Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. 3 The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by pots of meat and ate all the bread we wanted. Instead, you brought us into this wilderness to make this whole assembly die of hunger!"

4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. This way I will test them to see whether or not they will follow my instructions."

What is your first reaction to the grumbling of the Israelites?

Contempt

Frustration

Pity

Empathy

After God had proven Himself many times over, even providing water for them in the wilderness (Ex. 15:22-27), the Israelites again grumbled in fear instead of resting in faith. Their fear caused them to complain and to distrust God. They started believing it would have been better to die in Egypt as slaves than to follow God in the wilderness.

Yet once more we see God's faithfulness, love, and grace on display for His fearful and distrusting people. God's patience truly runs deep. God responded to their grumbling not in wrath but in love, raining down bread from heaven to feed them. While the refrain of the Israelites was to doubt God, question Him, and walk in disobedience, God's refrain is to extend His grace, mercy, and forgiveness again and again and again.

God Is Gracious: God's _____ is to delight in giving unmerited favor to those who are _____. His grace toward sinners is found most clearly in the salvation He has provided through _____.

What are some ways we can remind ourselves of God's love for us in Christ when it feels as if God's love has waned or ceased?

Point 2: God provides for His people despite their disobedience (Ex. 16:13-20).

13 So at evening quail came and covered the camp. In the morning there was a layer of dew all around the camp. **14** When the layer of dew evaporated, there were fine flakes on the desert surface, as fine as frost on the ground. **15** When the Israelites saw it, they asked one another, “What is it?” because they didn’t know what it was.

Moses told them, “It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat. **16** This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Gather as much of it as each person needs to eat. You may take two quarts per individual, according to the number of people each of you has in his tent.’”

17 So the Israelites did this. Some gathered a lot, some a little. **18** When they measured it by quarts, the person who gathered a lot had no surplus, and the person who gathered a little had no shortage. Each gathered as much as he needed to eat. **19** Moses said to them, “No one is to let any of it remain until morning.” **20** But they didn’t listen to Moses; some people left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and stank. Therefore Moses was angry with them.

In this test, God was teaching the Israelites not to rely on their own efforts but instead to rest in His perfect provision. Even in trials and tribulations, the Lord provides. He satisfies. God would provide manna every day for His people for forty years as they wandered in the wilderness. He gave them exactly what they needed to flourish, and He does the same for us.

In what ways has the Lord provided for you, even in difficult times?

The bread God provided, called “manna,” was not just satisfying but also *sanctifying*. It not only fed their appetites, it also fed their faith. God had told Moses as much: His provision of quail and manna would cause the Israelites to know He is the Lord (Ex. 16:12). Later, when Moses reflected on this time in the wilderness, he described it this way: “He humbled you by letting you go hungry; then he gave you manna to eat, which you and your fathers had not known, so that you might learn that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD” (Deut. 8:3).

Voices from the Church

“Going through the wilderness was not necessary for Israel’s salvation, but it was necessary for their sanctification.” 1

—Philip Graham Ryken

Point 3: God provides for His people in unexpected ways (Ex. 17:3-6; 1 Cor. 10:1-4).

3 But the people thirsted there for water and grumbled against Moses. They said, “Why did you ever bring us up from Egypt to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”

4 Then Moses cried out to the LORD, “What should I do with these people? In a little while they will stone me!”

5 The LORD answered Moses, “Go on ahead of the people and take some of the elders of Israel with you. Take the staff you struck the Nile with in your hand and go. **6** I am going to stand there in front of you on the rock at Horeb; when you hit the rock, water will come out of it and the people will drink.” Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel.

God once again provided for His people in spite of their faithlessness, but He did so in an unusual way to reveal both His power and His presence with certainty (Ex. 17:7). And once again we see that God was providing more than just water to satisfy His people’s thirst. This miracle pointed to the greater provision of salvation in Jesus. God chose to strike the rock and not His children, foreshadowing the day when He would send the Son to be struck once and for all for our salvation.

1 Now I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, all passed through the sea, **2** and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. **3** They all ate the same spiritual food, **4** and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ.

Why is it significant that God provided for the people of Israel in unexpected ways?

Because of our sin, we faced an impossible, hopeless situation, much more dire than that of the hungry and thirsty Israelites. But God provided the answer no one could expect: Through Jesus Christ’s life of perfect obedience and laying down His life on our behalf, we are able to have life in Him. Like the Israelites, we did nothing—we could do nothing—to earn or deserve Christ. All we have been called to do is surrender our control and trust in Him, our spiritual Rock struck for our salvation.

Why do we find surrender to God in Christ so difficult?

My Mission

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.

- **In what areas of your life will you trust God for His provision instead of trusting in your own effort?**
- **What are some ways your group can help meet the needs of others in your community as a way to point them to the greater provision of Christ?**
- **How will you demonstrate God's kindness this week so that others might come to trust in Jesus or be strengthened in their faith?**

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Exodus 15:22-27

When we first read this account, we may be sympathetic to Israel. Sure, they shouldn't have grumbled, but their concern was valid. They needed water to drink, to live. But when we press into this passage more, our sympathy should wane, and in its place, we should develop a keen appreciation of God's love and mercy.

How many times had God given them life to this point? Shouldn't they have known that God was more than able to preserve their lives?

How many times had God shown His power? Shouldn't they have known that God was more than able to give them water to drink?

And who was leading them to the precise location where they found no water? Shouldn't they have known that God was more than able to guide them on the path they needed to be on?

But instead, they complained, as if God is either (A) unable to provide for the needs of His people, (B) uncaring about the needs of His people, or (C) unaware of the needs of His people. Take your pick. Israel either viewed God as weak, sinister, or clueless. That was the nature of their grumbling, and it is the nature of ours as well. As we dive deeper into this passage, we see the depth of Israel's sin, and ours.

How have you grumbled against God recently? What does this time of complaining show about how you viewed God in that situation?

Voices from Church History

"God is ... sovereign in power, sovereign in wisdom, sovereign in love. He is too wise to be mistaken, too good to be unkind." 2
—Daniel Wilson (1778-1858)

Day 2: Read Exodus 16:1-12

The Israelites' memory was amazingly short, but thankfully God's love and patience are even more amazingly long. The people grumbled about lacking water and food even after seeing God provide supernaturally for their freedom. But instead of giving the people what they deserved—judgment from heaven—God gave them what they did not deserve—bread from heaven. Notice how He gave it to them, though; that detail is just as important as the provision itself. God gave them the food they needed each day as a way to teach them what they needed to learn: God is faithful, and He can be trusted.

As you consider God's goodness to you, don't miss that *what* God gives matters but so does the *how*, *when*, and *why*. God is the giver of perfect gifts (Jas. 1:17), and He gives these gifts in the perfect way, in the perfect timing, for the perfect reason—His glory and our good.

How have you seen God provide perfectly in your life?

Day 3: Read Exodus 16:13-36

It must have been difficult for the people to gather only what they needed to eat for the day, especially that first week manna fell from heaven. We may want to be sympathetic with the Israelites' struggle, or we may want to blast them for their distrust, but if we are honest, we do so because we see too much of ourselves in them.

The Israelites revealed hearts of greed and distrust when they refused to follow God's instructions and attempted to hoard the manna. When we seek to hoard what God has given to us, which is everything, we reveal the same hearts. Our greed drives us to seek what we need, what we want, what will make us happy. And at the same time, we declare to God, intentionally or unintentionally: "I do not trust You. I do not believe You know what I need and want. I do not believe You care. I do not believe You know what is best." The reality is that we are just as susceptible to these moments as Israel was. We rationalize our hoarding just as easily, just as persuasively. And because of this, we are to be just as grateful to God for His mercy, the mercy that falls freely from heaven that we depend on so greatly every morning.

What are some things you might be hoarding today: time, possessions, relationships, etc.?

Day 4: Read Exodus 17:1-16

Once again—yes, still another time—the people of Israel complained because they had no water to drink. And once again, they offered their refrain of asking why Moses led them into the wilderness to die. This time, when Moses cried out to God, he said something quite ironic, although he had no way of knowing: he was worried that the people would stone him. Little did Moses know that a stone, or more precisely a rock, would not take his life but would be the object God used to provide life-giving water to the people. We have to wonder if Moses caught on to this afterward. For the people, God provided water in a way they would never expect—no one would ever think of water flowing from a rock. But for Moses, there was an added dimension to God's miraculous provision that included the protection of his life.

How has God turned around situations in your life for His glory and your good?

Day 5: Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

The church at Corinth was in shambles. Open sin, division, strife, selfishness, and even some who rejected of the core of the gospel—resurrection—plagued their fellowship. And so, Paul drew the attention of the Corinthian believers to the exodus account so that they could look to the Israelites, see how they failed to grasp God's goodness right before them, be convicted, and learn from their spiritual ancestors.

Our greatest takeaway in this passage is seeing Paul refer to the rock that Moses struck as Jesus, but there is more than that for us here. We too often need to be reminded of our spiritual neglect, of our sin, of our failure to live out our true identities in Christ. But the message that Paul communicated to the Corinthians applies to us as well. We are not alone in our failings. We are not the first who have acted so foolishly, and until Jesus returns, we will not be the last. We too are called to learn from the failings and faithfulness of God's people who have gone before us. We are not to study the Israelites in Exodus or the Christians in 1 Corinthians with contempt but rather with humility, recognizing that all of us are in desperate need of God's grace, not just unto salvation but throughout it as well.

Who are some of the individuals or peoples in Scripture or church history that you have learned from the most? From whom can you learn in the days to come?

Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- God provides for His people in their time of need (Ex. 16:2-4).
- God provides for His people despite their disobedience (Ex. 16:13-20).
- God provides for His people in unexpected ways (Ex. 17:3-6; 1 Cor. 10:1-4).

How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?

What rhythms of life will you establish to fight against the inclination to grumble and complain? Why is it necessary to be intentional when it comes to changing habitual attitudes?

Do you struggle with feelings of entitlement? If so, how? Why should remembering the reality of God's grace in Christ undermine any sense of personal entitlement?

References

1. Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*, in *Preaching the Word* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 414.
2. Daniel Wilson, "Obituary: The Rev. Basil Woodd," in *The Christian Observer*, vol. 31 (London: J. Hatchard and Son, Piccadilly, 1831), 312.