

## **LEANING INTO YOUR DIFFICULTIES**

*The Life of Moses: Deliverance Through Faith*

**Numbers 10:33-11:15**

Chadron Berean Church

I think that most of us are here this morning because we love the Lord Jesus, want to know Him better and be more like Him. We want to grow spiritually. We want to be part of a church, a community of believers, that is growing and moving forward in their spiritual walk together. But one of the things we don't typically think about in our pursuit to grow is that Jesus experienced much discomfort, opposition, hardship, and persecution. Even Jesus learned obedience through suffering (Heb. 5:8). It's not that He was prone to disobedience, but that he fully entered the human experience. Experiencing difficulties, long or short, big or small, is part of life. And it's an important part of life because so much of our growth and our learning comes through the difficulties we face. So today we're going to look at some principles from the life of Moses on how to respond properly to the difficulties we face in life. Do we *fight* them? *Flee* from them? *Freeze* up? Or lean in and move *forward by faith*?

This morning we're picking up the story of Moses' life in Numbers 10:33. The people of Israel are setting out from Mt. Sinai after spending approximately a year there and are excited to enter the promised land. By the way, we should be wrapping up this study by the end of May. After that, I have a stand-alone sermon on my mind. Then we'll switch gears for the summer months with a new study (TBR) to be revealed. I'm not going to tell you now because I want us to stay focused on Moses.

### **I. ISRAEL SETS OUT FOR THE PROMISED LAND. (VV. 10:33-36)**

*33 Thus they set out from the mount of Yahweh three days' journey, with the ark of the covenant of Yahweh journeying in front of them for the three days, to spy out a resting place for them. 34 Now the cloud of Yahweh was over them by day when they set out from the camp. 35 Then it happened when the ark set out that Moses said, "Rise up, O Yahweh! And let Your enemies be scattered, And let those who hate You flee before You." 36 And when it came to rest, he said, "Return, O Yahweh, To the myriad thousands of Israel."*

So believe it or not, this is actually the high point of the book of Numbers.<sup>1</sup> Things are really looking up at this point. Israel has the presence of God dwelling among them. They've got the Law and the tabernacle. They're organized. They've got all the instruments made and music ready to march too. I mean this is a spiritual high point! Moses has to be excited. The sons of Israel are excited. They're heading to the promised land! Before they set out, Moses says, "*Rise up and let Your enemies be scattered!*" That's an expression of faith. He's saying they can take the promised land because Yahweh is their God! So they're moving forward by faith. However, after only 3 days into their travels the tone begins to change...

### **II. THE RABBLE BEGIN TO COMPLAIN. (11:1-9)**

11:1 Now the people became like those who complain of calamity in the ears of Yahweh. And Yahweh heard it and His anger was kindled, and the fire of Yahweh burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. 2 The people therefore cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to Yahweh, and the fire died out. 3 So the name of that place was called Taberah because the fire of Yahweh burned among them. 4 And the rabble who were among them had greedy desires; and also the sons of Israel wept again and said, “Who will give us meat to eat? 5 We remember the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic, 6 but now our appetite is dried up. There is nothing at all to look at except this manna.” 7 Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its appearance like that of bdellium. 8 The people would go about and gather it and grind it between two millstones or beat it in the mortar, and boil it in the pot and make cakes with it; and its taste was as the taste of cakes baked with oil. 9 And when the dew fell on the camp at night, the manna would fall with it.

So this reminds me of long family car rides. The kids complain, “Are we there yet? When we going to get there? Do we have to?” And the parents lose their cool just as Moses will. And I don’t know if it crossed your mind or not but after the Israelites were delivered through the Red Sea, they marched for how many days before they started complaining? **3 days** (Ex. 15:22). That’s no coincidence. In fact, basically everything from the Red Sea to Sinai will basically be on repeat now in the book of Numbers leaving Mt. Sinai, only God doesn’t respond positively like He did before. Look at some of the parallels on the chart (below). It’s all repeated, but this time negatively so.

"EXODUS—Before Sinai	NUMBERS—After Sinai
Miriam's song of praise—15:20-21	Miriam and Aaron rebel—12
complaint about water, bitter water made sweet, the LORD heals—15:22-26	unspecified complaint—angry fire of the LORD kills—11:1-3
manna/quail—16	manna/quail—11:4-15, 31-35
water from the rock—17:1-7	water from the rock—20:1-13
leaders appointed to ease Moses' burdens—18	leaders appointed to ease Moses' burdens—11:16-30
Israel attacks Amalek and is victorious—17:8-16	Israel attacks Amalek and is defeated—14:39-45" <sup>1</sup>

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Miriam praised God. When they complained about water, He sweetened bitter water or gave them some from a rock. Hungry? He provided manna and quail. They defeat their enemies. But post-Sinai, God judges Miriam for rebellion; Moses strikes a rock in anger and is disciplined; God sends quail in judgement; and Israel is defeated by Amalek. *What’s the difference? Why the different responses from God?* The difference is that whereas before when they complained about the difficulties, God came through and like a young child taught them about His sovereign power and grace. He taught them who He was. But *now they know better*. They know God. They

have His Law. They're in a covenant with Him. They shouldn't be spiritual babies anymore. So there's going to be discipline for a lack of responding in obedient faith. Think about it: instead of complaining now, they should look up in faith and rely on Him because of who He has proven Himself to be. They are to turn to Him, *not in a faithless complaint, but in faith-filled reliance*. In Numbers, *the complaints become acts of faithlessness*.

This is powerful stuff right here: From here on out, Israel enters into **spiritual decline**, so much so that they never enter the promised land. In just a few more days they could be at the border of the promised land and ready to enter it. But instead, an entire generation and Moses included, will fail to enter the promised land. And it all started with...complaining. Grumbling. In complaining, they failed in their walk of faith and it was the first step off a slippery slope. By the way, we aren't much different. We might have faith that saves, but in our day to day, and moment to moment, we might fail in our "walk of faith." We might fail to exercise faith in a certain situation.

I don't know if you caught it but in verse 4 you see some of the instigators of the complaining. Verse 4 calls them "**the rabble**." Exodus 12:38 calls them a "**rabble of non-Israelites**" (NLT) or "**the mixed multitude**." It's a people of various backgrounds that lived on the outskirts of the camp and for selfish reasons or another had attached themselves to the sons of Israel. But this rabble who lacked a spiritual appetite became a persistent sore on the body of God's people. I looked up the definition of a **rabble rouser**: one dictionary defined it as "*a person who speaks with the intention of inflaming the emotions of a crowd of people*." Webster's defined rabble rousers as, "*one that stirs up the masses of the people (as to hatred or violence)*." They really weren't sure who they were. They weren't all in on Yahweh or all in on Egypt. They were floaters. People who lived "on the fence" spiritually. They don't feel totally comfortable in the world or totally comfortable among God's people. And that's because they're half-hearted followers of Yahweh. People who wanted to follow Yahweh but wanted to follow the world too. I reckon they saw what God did to Egypt in His wrath and how Israel was spared and blessed, and probably started clinging to Israel out of self-protection or for the blessing. They were just along for the ride, hoping to catch some of Israel's blessings along the way. This means they certainly didn't want to follow God if it meant any difficulty.

It brings up a relevant question: *Are you on the fence or fully devoted? Half-hearted or wholehearted?* If you're on the fence with Christ, you'll only follow until you face difficulties. You'll quit when things get tough. You won't yield your life to Him as Lord. You'll hold back on certain areas of your life. You might give Him your time on Sunday morning, but not your wallet. Not your Friday night. Not your relationship with that someone. There's certain fleshly appetites that you want to satisfy more than a heavenly appetite. So many Christians today are trying to live with one foot in church and one foot in the world. And they cause themselves a lot of pain and discontentment. They're uncomfortable both places because they know the truth but they don't live it. They don't embrace it. They're addicted to the false freedom of sin. They want to live out *their plans* for their life and refuse to give their lives to the Lord.

**Be fully devoted to God. Give Him your whole heart.**

God wants us to be fully devoted to Him. Wholehearted followers of His. That's the first principle for us today for making it through difficulties that come with following Jesus. You must restfully trust in the sovereign Yahweh God. Embrace *His* plan for your life. Give up *fighting* for your own plans. Quit *fleeing* when things get tough. *Lean into Yahweh by faith.* Remember the story of the 12 spies in Number 13? Only two of them (Joshua and Caleb) entered the promised land because only their hearts were fully devoted to God. They believed God was big enough to conquer their enemies. The others didn't enter God's "rest" because they complained and groaned about how difficult it would be. Hebrews 3:11 says, "*They were not able to enter because of unbelief.*"

### III. THE LAMENT OF MOSES. (11:10-15)

*10 Now Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, each man at the doorway of his tent; and the anger of Yahweh was kindled greatly, and it was evil in the sight of Moses. 11 So Moses said to Yahweh, "Why have You allowed this evil toward Your slave? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all this people on me? 12 Was it I who conceived all this people? Was it I who gave birth to them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries a nursing baby, to the land which You swore to their fathers'? 13 Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me, saying, 'Give us meat that we may eat!' 14 I alone am not able to carry all this people because it is too heavy for me. 15 So if You are going to deal thus with me, please kill me at once, if I have found favor in Your sight, and do not let me see my wretchedness."*

Well that's not the exactly the kind of prayer you expect to hear on Sunday morning is it? But at least it's an honest one and he turned to the right place. Sadly though, Moses let the complainers drag him down into their misery. He enters into a state of self-pity, filled with why questions. He even expresses a desire to be altogether done with it. It provides us with another principle:

**Cast your burden(s) upon the Lord and find spiritual friends to carry it with you.**

When in deep discouragement like this, you need to turn to the Lord and cast your burdens upon Him, for He cares for you (1 Peter 5:7). You need the Lord to get through it. In your difficulty, prioritize unhurried devotional time with the Lord in prayer and in His Word. Also, the Lord grants Moses more elders to help him (Num. 11:16). So find some spiritual friends to help carry the load with you (Gal. 6:2). And be patient. Sometimes it takes a lot of time to come out of deep discouragement. Those in ministry are no exception. Ministry is difficult because people are difficult (and ministers are people too). That's why it's so important to take care of yourself mentally, physically, and spiritually.

But folks, in this life difficulties will come. The challenges will come. As with the Israelites, God's not so much concerned about our comfort as He is our growth. And growth only comes through challenges. But how we respond to them is crucial. And complaining is not the mature spiritual response that God is looking for. Complaining is the first sinful step off a slippery slope into ingratitude and doubt and deep discouragement (Rom. 1:21). It hindered this spiritual body of people from moving forward in maturity and being a light to the nations. Turn to **Philippians 2:14-15** with me and let's read it together. It gives us another principle:

**Enduring difficulties without complaining provides a light and example for others.<sup>3</sup>**

Paul says we are to be lights in this world by being different. One of the ways we are different is that we handle difficulties differently—by faith. We are grateful, not grumblers. By faith, we rejoice in all circumstances. We keep our thoughts focused on what is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, good in the situation (Phil. 4). We rest in God's complete sovereignty. And we grow into maturity (Jas. 1:2-4). Maybe you're in a difficult situation now. Do you still believe that God is good? That He is all-powerful? That He is sovereign? Then what's with the complaining? You can either trust God and let the difficulty bring out the best in you, or you can complain and let it bring out the worst in you.

**Refuse to listen to the rabble.**

I would submit this morning that if we are going to be the lights this world needs us to be, we must continually refuse to listen to the rabble! Without thinking about it, we let the rabble into our homes day and night. Media is full of rabble rousers. They're everywhere! There's even rabble in our sinful hearts. I read something this week that said, *"Listen to your heart... and then tell that idol factory to be quiet."* So many complaints arise from us not getting to worship the idols we prefer—the god of comfort. The god of our stomachs. The god of self.

**Lean into the difficulties by faith.**

Instead of complaining, Israel should've done is leaned into their difficulties by faith like they said they would do when they set out on this journey. No water? Ha! Watch God provide! Enemies approaching? Let's see what God will do! Yesterday, I was on the water with my father-in-law. We were fishing when those stiff 20-25 mile an hour winds came up. You know, if you don't point your boat directly into those waves and lean into them, they will take you where you don't want to go. Like boating or kayaking or sailing, you have to lean into the wind. If you fight, flee, or freeze, and don't lean in by faith, you will capsize. We must learn to weather storms well, leaning in by faith, seeing what God is going to do!

This week I spent some time reading the book that I gave to the graduates called *Delivering Your Future* by C. David Morgan. It's an excellent book. If any of my kids were in college or preparing for college, I'd be getting this book into their hands. He does such a great job of helping you understand yourself. Anyway, at one point he discusses a difficulty his family went through. You see, his dad started a homebuilding company that grew into the 10<sup>th</sup> largest private builder in the country. The whole family was involved in it. They served more than 25,000 clients over 25 years. They did their work as if unto the Lord, building unique, but affordable dream homes for people. Business was so good that they were the title sponsor of the Indianapolis Colts back when Peyton Manning was quarterback and Tony Dungie was coach. Their family name used to flash across the screens at the games. Everyone had heard of their family name. Then, almost overnight, everything flipped. The housing market dropped out and everything spiraled out of their control. They were forced to either close the company or put in a large sum of personal funds to try and keep it afloat with no promises as to when the recession would end. They ended up closing the company and for 3 years dealt with aggressive attorneys and creditors and buyers whose houses were already under construction. He said it was one of

the darkest times his family had ever walked through. Imagine the temptations to complain in that situation. Imagine the “why” questions that were forming in their hearts.

But you know, he said walking through that dark season was one of the best things that ever happened to them. 1) It created a reliance upon God that the family thought they had before it happened. 2) They learned they had started to place their identity in the prestigious company, developing a sense of worth based on it. Now they learned to put their identity in the unchanging Christ. 3) It pushed him and all his siblings into their own callings. Before, he was convinced his role was to take up his dad’s mantle. Now, he understood God created him uniquely and started to understand himself. 4) It gave him a ministry to others.<sup>4</sup>

**Instead of “why?” ask “what?” or “how?”**

To help you lean into the difficulty that you are in, instead of asking rhetorical questions of self-pity ask, “What?” or “How?” *“What is God doing through the difficulties going on in my life? What is He trying to teach me? What has He taught me in the past that I need to apply right now? What are some promises of God that override my current thinking or feelings? How can I demonstrate my faith in a practical, active way in this difficulty?”* I think those questions will help you not only go through the valley, but grow through the valley.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Numbers* (2023 Edition), 57.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>3</sup> C. David Morgan, *Delivering Your Future: A Call to Abundant Life in College* (Appleton House Publishing Group, 2020), 163.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 163-168.