

**Focal Passage:** Exodus 16:2-15

**Background Text:** Exodus 16:2-30

**Purpose Statement:** To contrast our human nature with God's grace

**Key Verse:** "I've heard the complaints of the Israelites. Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat. And in the morning you will have your fill of bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God'" (Exodus 16:12).

Are we there yet? I'm hungry! I have to go to the bathroom! Ray is bothering me! I think I'm going to throw up! Lisa is hogging all of the cool air! So went the melodious songs from the back seat. Dad, with Mom as copilot, drove the nine of us and Fritz the 40-pound dachshund across the country each summer. Our destination was always a campground where we would spend the better part of the week enjoying nature. But how we could complain along the way! Someone was always in someone else's space, or it happened that some other offense or slight discomfort was shared with the entire crew.

Dad, in his typical fatherly manner, would periodically issue the statement "If I hear one more word, I'm going to pull this car over, and then . . ." That's how Dad dealt with insurrection and unruly passengers. When I look back on those trips, they were perhaps the most wonderful experiences of my young life.

As you read the biblical accounts of the Israelites, do you sometimes wonder why, as God heard their whining, God too did not threaten to pull the caravan over if there was one more complaint? Certainly, the Israelites knew

how to raise a fuss. What seems most amazing, however, is that the focus of their whining and bad behavior was centered on their opinion that God did not care about them, made mistakes, or somehow was not “God enough” for them. Isn’t it remarkable to think that they would not trust in God for their very lives? Who would act in such a way?

Today’s lesson is another in our series of understanding God’s grace. It invites us to revisit the Israelites and take time to see how different their (and our) approach to life is from God’s nature.

### **The Academy Award Goes to . . .**

Children typically do not have a strong inner sense of governing their behavior, so they can sometimes be overly dramatic. Adults can, too, but when we hear an adult whining and offering their woes to the world, we are apt to say, “Oh, grow up!” That’s because they are acting like children, who love to act.

It’s no wonder, then, that God’s people were called the “children” of Israel. That was their style, their mode of operating. Exodus 16:2 tells us, “The whole Israelite community complained against Moses and Aaron in the desert.” Can you read the drama in their complaints? “Oh, how we wish that the LORD had just put us to death while we were still in the land of Egypt. There we could sit by the pots cooking meat and eat our fill of bread. Instead you’ve brought us out into this desert to starve this whole assembly to death” (verse 3).

Good grief! Keep in mind that this whining happened “the fifteenth day of the second month after they had left the land of Egypt,” roughly a mere 45 days after they were set free from over 400 years in slavery (verse 1). And after only that short amount of time, they were in agony and distress because things were not exactly going their way.

Notice, too, that their complaints were not against one another, like riding in the middle of a car seat with two big brothers invading your space. Their complaint was against God. “Who are we? Why blame us? . . . Your complaints aren’t against us but against the LORD,” Moses challenged the people when they complained to him and to Aaron (verses 7, 8). The people inferred that God was not just absent or didn’t care; their tone almost seemed to suggest that God was the actor in their pain and responsible for their woes.

We would never do that, right? It’s not in our nature to whine to God, is it? If the temperature is not quite right or the sun is shining in our eyes, we would never make such a fuss, would we? Of course, I’m being facetious. Certainly, we would—or at least, I would, along with so many other humans throughout time.

It’s tempting for us to make the baseline of our lives our personal comfort and having all of our needs met. It can be easy when something is lacking in our lives to determine that all is lost and that life is hardly worth living. Sin is not just being disobedient and doing things we know we should not do. Sin is an orientation in our lives that says we are most important and that we deserve all that we want and hope for. It says that life is all about me, and if I don’t get everything I need and want, then someone is going to be blamed.

Remember that the whining of the people occurred while they were living in freedom, being led across a sea on dry land, as God protected them from Pharaoh’s army. Clothed in freedom, filled with the presence of God, they still felt hungry, so nothing was right.

While we can easily read this portion of Scripture and shake our heads in disapproval, criticizing the children of Israel, we ought also to read it as a caution not to get so carried away with a “me-first, me-only” attitude. That way



leads to death—the death of joy and the death of gratitude. It also serves as a good reminder to us to take stock of what God has done in our lives, ways God has provided for and delivered us, comforted us when we have been heartbroken, and undergirded our hopes and efforts.

*How can you reframe a bad or uncomfortable personal situation in light of God's care for you?*

### God's Ear

It appeared from my sister Amy's text that Mom had had another small stroke. Already bedbound for a couple of years due to cancer, Mom had been suffering with what seemed to be strokes, which further kept her from talking in complete sentences or sometimes knowing her children.

I was 1,000 miles away when Amy cautioned that Mom wasn't doing well. I can't think of a more helpless feeling than hearing that news when you are so far away. I immediately texted Cheri to let her know and to share the pain and frustration I was feeling. Her response was just as I expected: She was going to pray right then.

At 90 years old, Mom's life had been a long one for sure, so Cheri's prayer, which I joined, was for Mom to be without pain and to live until she no longer was able. It's as if we picked her up and plopped her right into God's hands. Of course, that's where she had been all along. I checked the next morning, and Mom was doing much better. She was eating and alert. Was this an answer to prayer? Did God do what I asked for? I think better that God heard me but already knew what I desired. Hopefully, our prayers simply aligned our hearts and minds more fully with God's will for this situation.

God said, "I've heard the complaints of the Israelites" (Exodus 16:11). Notice that God did not call them "my children" but instead gave them a title that seemed to put distance between them and God. God said, in effect,

"What I will do is what I, the Lord, am able to do. I will rain down bread from the sky! What you will fill your bellies with will come from my hand, so that you will know that your life is in my hands as well."

Scripture tells us that God not only provided one miracle but two. In addition to bread (or "manna," as the people called it, verse 31), God sent a flock of quail that "covered the camp" (verse 13). What a huge flock that must have been, and it was enough for every child of Israel to be fed.

When morning came, so came the manna, as thin as frost but carrying the promise of God to care for them in the wilderness. The gift of manna continued for 40 years until the nation crossed over the Jordan and arrived at the border of Canaan (verse 35).

What does this tell us about God? Certainly, we have to use the word *grace* again. All that they received after their complaining was a gift. They didn't earn it, didn't work for it, and maybe didn't deserve it; but God was gracious to them and sustained them by miraculous means. That is who God is. God is the one who sustained an entire nation and did so simply out of the love and devotion God has for them. God has the power and the inclination to love and to do so in concrete and awesome ways.

Perhaps you can recall times in your life when what you desperately needed or what you hoped for came to be and could've come only as a gift from God. Each of us has been sustained by God. That's not to say that God is a heavenly wish-granter or subject to our whining. It is to say that God's very nature is to care. God has cared for us in the past, cares for us today, and will care for us in the future.

The very grace of God means that we don't walk through the wilderness alone or without what we need to survive. When we experience desert times, the claim of our faith allows us to thank God for the gift of grace that sees us through and helps us survive, with meat in the



evening and bread every morning, in whatever forms they take. God knows our needs and is at work in our lives to provide the grace we need to live this day.

*What do you need right now in your life?*

### **Just Enough**

When things break around our house, somehow the “victim” always ends up in front of me on the kitchen table. It’s in my family job description. I have been ridiculed and mocked for searching for the best “break-fixers” I can find. To that end, I have amassed a large number of effective (and some not effective) glues, pastes, epoxies, and other substances. As I think about it now, I recall that Dad also had a rather large variety of mending devices at his disposal.

What I have learned when it comes to these fixes, through many trials and many errors, is that more is not always better. When it comes to putting something back together, adhesive wise, just the right amount makes all the difference, holds well, and looks good. When I have squirted, squished, or dumped too much adhesive substance on the broken item, it doesn’t stay together; it simply falls apart, and I have to start over. The principle of “just enough” sometimes looks like we should try more, but the difference between failure and success lies in faith that just enough is enough.

Remember that God showered the Israelites with manna each morning, but it was good only for that day. “The people will go out each day and gather just enough for that day,” God told Moses. “In this way, I’ll test them to see whether or not they follow my Instruction” (Exodus 16:4). They could eat their fill of that holy bread, but “on the sixth day, when they measure out what they have collected, it will be twice as much as they collected on other days” (verse 5). Would they be obedient to the God who

sustained their lives, or would they try to protect themselves by amassing more than just enough?

We find later in Scripture that, indeed, some of the Israelites did try to collect more manna than they needed for one day, and it became infested with worms (verse 20). Others tried to collect what they needed on the sabbath, but none fell that day. God, of course, was displeased with the people in both instances.

Every morning for 40 years, the Israelites woke up to bread for the day, daily bread. Every morning was an opportunity for them to thank God for what was provided to them, although it appears, as we move through Exodus, that still, the voice of the Israelites was more complaint than praise.

What is just enough for your life? When I am honest, I can name a number of things I wish I could amass or things I think I need more of. I can identify other things I would like to have in order to protect my future.

Perhaps the finest example of living in grace and knowing the grace of God is to continue to discern what is just enough in so many parts of our lives. I’m not talking about doing without what we genuinely need. But I believe we offer a greater witness of faith when we are not weighed down by the “too much” of life—anything that we crave more than need.

Let each day’s manna be an exercise in faith, and know that God will provide for your needs, so long as we trust and are obedient to God’s instruction. Grace abounds.

*What do you have in your life that is indeed “just enough”? Where do you see evidence of the grace of God in your life today?*

**God of Abundance, give me this day my daily bread, and give me faith to wait upon you for tomorrow’s blessing; in Jesus’ name. Amen.**