



THE STORY



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Scripture: The Story – Chapter 6

June 25, 2016. A charmingly handsome 40-year-old man; a young, young, young, mother of two; 2 young girls; and a vehicle fully stocked with coloring books, Full House videos, and enough ketchup flavored potato chips to feed a small army. And to top it off, an 8-month-old Shih Tzu puppy who would not be content unless it was peering over top of the steering wheel or sleeping on the gas pedal/accelerator.

After a short 2-hour journey from where we started, the adventure would now lead to a 16 hour overnight Atlantic Ocean crossing on a super-ferry that resulted in the young, young, young mother of two spending some uncomfortable moments with her face up close to the most “intimate pieces of porcelain furniture” in our little washroom-there’s a reason one of those ferries was affectionately nicknamed “The Vomit Comet”.

The next morning led to a 638-km drive to Fredericton NB- an unfortunate highlight was a sudden roadside stop in order to give the girls in the backseat a stern piece of instruction- eat your potato chips, watch your videos, or be prepared to swim back to Newfoundland.

Morning 3 held a 711-km trek down the lovely St. Lawrence River to Drummondville QC- I only heard the phrase, “are we there yet”, about 30 times that day. Morning 4 had a “light day” in store- only 407 kms to Kingston ON. That day, we discovered an outlet mall and I got my first taste of just how much money it would cost me to raise 2 daughters in ON.

Morning 5, thankfully brought us to our destination. 440 kms from Kingston to London was supposed to be one of our easiest and shortest days. Let’s just say that when one male is trapped in a vehicle with 4 females (including the dog) for 5 days, and over 2000 kms, no day is guaranteed to be an easy day!

Matt left off last week with the people of Israel coming out of Egypt, traveling south, and receiving the law at Mount Sinai. God gives Moses the 10 commandments, as a sort of “spiritual detox” for the people of Israel. I heard it said in my studies last week that God had brought the “Israelites out of Egypt”, and here at Sinai, with the 10 commandments, he was about to “get Egypt out of Israel”. Getting the thoughts about Egypt’s gods and Egypt’s religious system out of the Israelites, was the point of Sinai. God knew that if he was going to bring this nation anywhere, if he was going to bring them back into society so to speak, the spiritual detox of Egypt’s gods was critical, and he attempted to do this, at Sinai.

After this 1 year spiritual detox period, now that they had been learning how to relate to and to love Israel’s God and not Egypt’s gods, it was time to move, time to head out, time to journey towards their integration back into society. This society, was the Promised Land, promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This next move, was not a real massive move when it comes to distance to be traveled. God wanted to move these people from Mt. Sinai, to this place called Kadesh Barnea, which was about 500 km north. No big deal right?

This all sounds good in theory. But no road trip goes as planned- especially when it's not 2 parents, 2 kids, and a dog, but a leader with no GPS trying to get 2-2.5 million people or so, from point A to B. It could be comparable to Matt and Paul, being Moses and Aaron, leading a group of people that could range from the size of the city of Montreal to the city of Toronto, on a 500-km hike north, from London to North Bay. Sound like fun? Matt probably thinks so! I'm not sure about Paul. Not sure what I would think either.

God attempted to conduct 1 year of "spiritual detox", now Moses and Aaron and the leaders move out with the people, they are going North towards Canaan, the Promised Land, Israel as we now know it...they end up landing at this place called Kadesh Barnea, an 11 month road trip. During this travel, the iPads didn't keep the kids content and the ketchup flavored potato chips didn't keep the children in the back seat quiet for too long. In this 11-month trip, Moses learned a lot about his people. He learned that, when kids don't get what they want, they complain, a lot! Once they got far enough from Egypt, and the Wi-Fi/Netflix stopped working, Moses had some very, very, angry, kids.

On this "mini journey", the nation of Israel chronically complained about things that still are intimately seeded deep in the human spirit. Their issues were mostly connected to apparent shortfalls with their spiritual leaders or with God himself.

Questions of God's Sympathy

They really wondered if Moses knew what He was doing, and they questioned if God really knew and cared about their personal predicaments. Only just after setting out from Sinai, just after getting the kids in the vehicle so to speak, we hear this phrase,

P. 71/Numbers 11:1

Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord, and when He heard them His anger was aroused"

"This trip is too hard, the way is too long, is there a Tim Hortons on the way? There's no place where I can charge my iPhone! I've not been able to tweet in 2 hours. My Netflix doesn't work. Do you care that I can't get on Instagram"? This trip has barely begun, and the people crank up the heat immediately. "When He (the Lord) heard them, His anger was aroused." This theme started back when they were trying to escape Pharaoh, before God used Moses to split the Red sea to perform one of the most profound miracles in Israeli history, we hear the people,

P.53/Exodus 14:12

"Why did you bring us out of Egypt? It would be better to serve the Egyptians than die in the desert!"

The overarching sentiment is Do you care what is happening to us here? The questions and complaints then become more heated and more antagonistic towards Moses and towards the One who called Moses. In this 11-month journey from Sinai to Kadesh Barnea, the questions move from questions of God's sympathy to.

Questions of God's Sustenance

Will God provide for us? Does he know, is he aware of my needs? Some of us ask this question: not will he give the things we need, but will he give the things we want?

We learned during a family vacation in Florida, that some of the US food is different than the same food in Canada. We went to our first family fine dining experience just outside Orlando, at a French cuisine place named, "poulet frit Kentucky", otherwise known as KFC or Kentucky Fried Chicken. Bella instantly complained when she discovered that her healthy meal was not served with French fries, but with mashed potato. "Dad, the KFC is so much better in Canada- I wish we could go back to Canada dad when the eating was all good....dad, what in the world shall we do...."

Well, she got her cue from her biblical ancestors, the Israelites! Even after God miraculously gave them food for their journey, they didn't like it, and they complained. "The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost- and the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic...but now we have lost our appetite...we never see anything only this miracle food..."

They wanted meat, God gave them meat,

P.73

"The Lord will give you meat.....and you will eat it....not one day, two days, five, ten, or twenty, but for a month, until it comes out your nostrils and you loathe it"

God drove these birds called quail ashore with a strong wind that caused these birds to be on the ground up to 2-3 feet deep as far as anyone could walk a day in any direction. A great place for bird hunters! "You want French fries, I'll give you French fries".

They questioned in the midst of this journey, whether God would provide their needs. They learned the things they wanted were not necessarily what they wanted or needed.

OK. Now I need you to hold on, we going to momentarily ascend to 40,000 feet for the broad perspective! Remember the people, as they journeyed, and would later wander: they questioned God's sympathy (does He care?) and they questioned his sustenance (can he provide for me?)

And after they arrive in Kadesh Barnea, they are so close to the Promised Land they can smell it. They are here on the southern border of Canaan. Moses sends in 12 spies, to examine Canaan- they are told to check out the land, the people, the towns, the soil, and the fruit. After 40 days, they come back, with the awesome fruit of the land. 10 of the 12 spies say, "It's a great land, but if we go in, we'll die. There are giants in the land". They spread a bad

report. But the 2 other spies responded with faith and said, "There are giants in the land, but we can take them. God is with us and not with them..."

But of course, this cantankerous, spiritually antagonistic, faith depleted mob, insisted that "we don't want to go...", which ranks as being one of the worst mistakes the nation of Israel ever made in their recorded collective history.

In the beginning of these wanderings, they questioned God's sympathy (does he care), they questioned God's sustenance (will he provide), and now they posed.

Questions of God's Strategy

Even though God had brought the people out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and performed one miracle after another, they doubted that God knew what he was doing. Does he have a plan? Does he have ability to execute that plan? Is His plan good?

And God didn't force them, He doesn't force anyone. He won't force you. He declares,

Pg. 77

"In this wilderness, your bodies will fall. Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the wilderness. For 40 years- one year for each of the forty days you explored the land, you will suffer your sins and know what it is like to have me against you..."

God's plan A turns into a plan B that the people brought on themselves. 40 years of wandering.

And, he brings it to pass. Right on the edge of the Promised Land, right here at Kadesh, and the people mess up God's awesome plan, big time. For 40 years, they wander in here and lots of bad things happen. The people repeat the same questions over and over again. They question God's sympathy (does God care we are suffering?), they question God's sustenance (will God care for our physical needs?) and they question God's strategy (We

would have done better under the Egyptian slaves. What is God doing?)

For 40 years, wandering here. A journey that should have taken a month. Takes 480 months. And they wander. And question. And doubt. And complain. And lose sight of God. The spiritual detox clearly didn't work. The people are "spiritually using" again.

These people were so challenging that they even made Moses so mad that He sunk to their level on one occasion. A story about a stick, a rock, and some water. Maybe a tale for some other time. His momentary slip up of disobedience to God causes this man who was described by God himself as someone who was "faithful in all his house", to become a person who God doesn't even allow to enter the Promised Land and only sees it from a distance. A sad, sad situation.

There are plenty of times in life, whether you are a believer or not, that you feel you are in a wilderness period, a time of testing, trial, suffering, loneliness. It's how we react in those times that our character develops or destructs. For the most part, when we are in these places of spiraling, cycling, going around in circles of life and trying to make sense of things, we often can act like the Israelites.

If we are Christians, in our spiritual wanderings: we pose questions of God's Sympathy (Does He Care), God's Sustenance (Will He Provide what I need), or God's Strategy (Does He have a plan?) Or you may not be a Christian, and when you find yourselves in these wilderness places of life, you ask the same questions around, Sympathy- A loving God wouldn't allow this; Sustenance- A providing God wouldn't see me without like this, and Strategy (An "in control" God wouldn't make me feel lost/alone like this)

How do you react when you're in a spiritual/life wilderness? What has been the most predominant "God question" you struggle with or that causes you

to struggle with the existence of God when you are spiraling in life and you seem lost?

When you are in a season of "spiritual/life wilderness", what do you question most about the engagement/existence of God?

A. The Sympathy of God (Does God Care for Me?)

B. The Sustenance of God (Will He Provide the Things I Need?)

C. The Strategy of God (Does He Have a Plan for Me In All This?)

A. The Sympathy of God

If you are now, or ever have been in a desert season of suffering, pain, loneliness, confusion, please hear me, that God's sympathy is so close to you. Even if you, and especially if you, just don't feel it.

And you aren't the first to question God's heart, God's caring, that sense of, "If God loves me, or if there is a God who cares, then how did I end up...here?" If you think, that you are alone in those thoughts, let me assure you, you're not.

One part of this story that I didn't get to really talk about, was how this story ends for Moses. This man of God who had been through so much with God, and so much with God's people. This man, who experienced God in amazing ways: through a burning bush, through the parting of the Red Sea, through the thunder and lightning of Mt. Sinai.

This man, was literally a "Jesus figure" to these spiritually stubborn Israelites for almost half a century:

- God's fire burns against the nation. Moses prays- the fire stops.

- God strikes Miriam with a plague for her attitude against Moses. Moses prays for Miriam. God spares her life.

- The people complained against God and God wants to strike them with a plague. Moses prays, God spares them.

- God strikes the nation with snakes. Moses prays- God provides a way for the people to live.

Moses was the “Father forgive them, for they don’t know what they do” leader, before Jesus later made the statement famous. And what happens to this faithful Jesus figure of Israel? God says, “Because you hit that rock rather than speak to it”, you don’t get to enter the Promised Land. I’ll let you see it, but not enter it”. As Moses was dying on the top of a mountain with Promised Land in view, as he was dying after giving his best to God and the Israelites, I wouldn’t be shocked if he had a moment of, “God, do you really care? Do you know how you are breaking my heart here?” Moses was human.

So, you’re not alone in this, and you will never be alone in this. It is part of the fallen human condition to question God in this way.

If you’re lost, you’re confused, and you wonder if God cares. He cares. We are told that not only is His care “present”, but its close.

I love this verse from the pen of the Psalmist- it sounds like it was born out of a desert experience:

Psalm 34:18

“The Lord is close to those who are broken-hearted, and he saves those who are crushed in spirit”

His care is not just there, it’s intimate. His presence is not just “around you” or in the “general proximity” as your heart breaks in the deserts of life, its close, as close as your next breath.

If you’re lost in the wilderness today, “breathe it in”. In the midst of the sand of life in your throat and the grit of the dirt of the wilderness in your teeth, you’ll find Jesus, as one who cares deeply, profoundly, walking with, the one who wanders. As he cared for His chosen people in the desert, He cares for His chosen people today walking through

deserts of life. He just doesn’t see you as you wander, but He wanders with you, and He loves you.

B. The Sustenance of God

If you are now, or ever have been in a desert season of suffering, pain, loneliness, confusion, it is part of the fallen human condition to question issues concerning, “How is God going to take care of me now?”

“My job has changed- how will God provide?” “I’m sick and can’t work anymore- will God take care of me?” “My spouse has died and I just don’t know how I’m going to make things work now.” “My employer has said, it’s time for you to move on... I just don’t know what comes next...” And on and on it goes. Deserts often times cause us to reflect and ponder on one of the things that is most important to us....ourselves.

In our chapter, God changed things up on the people of Israel in a big way! He took them out of Egypt, but also took away the onions, the garlic, the leeks, and many of them thought they would starve to death in the desert. Then as only God can do, he provides this miraculous piece of provision that the Israelites didn’t see coming- they didn’t see God’s next item on his menu of sustenance for them....Manna. So unexpected was this manna, they couldn’t even figure out what to call it, so they called it manna, which translates most basically from the Hebrew, “What is it?” or “What now!” Now for some of you, maybe your spouse has given you some food in your early years of marriage and you looked at it and said, “What is it?” but that’s not what we are talking about here.

Every day for 6 days they went around gathering manna, and on the 6th day they took enough for 2 days so they wouldn’t have to gather on the Sabbath. No more melons, no more onions and leeks, but every day, in the midst of their desert, one day at a time, God gave them enough- he gave them their daily bread. Jesus brings forward this idea of

God sustaining us, in desert places and elsewhere, in Matthew 6. He teaches people to pray by asking, “give us this day, our daily bread”. A prayer that traces its ancient footprints to the desert experience of God’s people, still speaks to God’s ability and desire to provide for His people today, in deserts and elsewhere.

We all land in desert places at sometimes in our lives, and if you haven’t yet, take cheer, it’s coming! But in those places, we need to be reminded that the theme of scripture from ancient Israel to the New Jerusalem is this, God sustains people in new and living ways. They may not be the same ways as “pre-desert”, but the bread of life will always find ways to feed and sustain His people.

David, a man who saw a few spiritual desert days himself, says this,

Psalms 37:23-27

“The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him;

24 though they may stumble, they will not fall, for the Lord upholds them with his hand.

25 I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken

or their children begging bread. 26 They are always generous and lend freely; their children will be a blessing.

He sees you in your desert, and He has manna prepared in advance for you. Like the Israelites, “O’ Lord, in our wanderings, “Give us this day, our daily bread...”

C. The Strategy of God

If you are now, or ever have been in a desert season of suffering, pain, loneliness, confusion, it is part of the fallen human condition to question issues concerning, “Does God actually have a plan/purpose for me in this?”

I’m sure there are many of us that can say, “the way my life has turned out so far, is not what I have planned.” Others of us can say, “I never dreamed at

this point in my life, I’d be in this place of chaos”. Some of us can say, “I thought when I became a Christian that my life would lead me down an easier path, but it’s been a tough path...”

Friends, allow me to be honest. The path that you are on, may not be God’s strategy for you. It could be one that you chose yourself. It could be a road of your choosing. And it’s a tough road. But the truth is this, even if that is the case, God’s strategy in this time is to teach you to trust Him, to teach you to lean on Him, to teach you to know that His plan for you is to prosper you, not to harm you, but to give you a hope and a future. You may just need to walk with Him for another little while before you see it.

Like the Israelites, there are some times that we reject God’s strategy, “Canaan that way”, and we end up “Desert...that way”. And the amazing thing is that, when the plan changed and the people didn’t go God’s way, and they ended up the way of the desert, God still chose to go with them. The desert wasn’t 40 years of wandering without God, it was 40 years of learning how to trust God and know his presence even they weren’t in a place that they wanted to be. But God was still there, leading them, and the same is true right now.

And for others of us, the road that we are on, or the desert that we find ourselves in, is not a road of our choosing- it is just where life has taken us. And in the midst of that, God is with you teaching you to trust His strategy along the way.

We all have our moments don’t we? Life takes a major turn and all of a sudden we are detoured from the freeway to the desert. One major life event, one major loss, one major family event, one major diagnosis, and all of a sudden, we can easily shift focus to, “Do you really know what you are doing here? I am really supposed to be here?”

Friends, I know what it is like, to literally have followed God from Newfoundland to Africa to Saskatchewan to Ontario trying to discover God’s strategy. And more often than not, it’s unclear. The

path is unclear. But on the journey, I have learned to trust that He is with me, His strategy can be trusted, and He is making you into who He wants you to be on the way.

The Israelites eventually came into the Promised Land as God promised, and He will lead you towards His preferred future for you too, if you will trust His strategy.

As you wander through the deserts of life, whether they be ones of your own choosing, or ones of God's specific strategy, the proverbial truth remains eternally true,

Proverbs.3:5-6

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and don't lean on your own understanding. In all your ways, even in the desert, acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight”

Then we have a similar choice. Will you, have you received the Lamb of God, Jesus who takes away the sins of the world? Will you stand under the blood of the cross? The gospel is free but it is never forced. We do have a choice. What is your choice today?

Points to Ponder

THE STORY

Moses: Wandering

Chapter 6

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. What do you think was the root cause of most of the Israelite's problems? Why?
2. How did God respond to the people's lack of faith?
3. What do you learn from Moses' leadership throughout this difficult period? How did he display frustration and faith?
4. How have you reacted when you've felt as if you were wandering in a spiritual wilderness? Explain.