

# FRUSTRATION: Roots, Dangers, and Recovery

RC BLAKES

NUMBERS 20:1-13

Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock. And he said to them, 'Hear now, you rebels: shall we bring water for you out of this rock?' And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, and water came out abundantly.

## 1. THE ROOT OF FRUSTRATION: CLASH BETWEEN EXPECTATION AND REALITY

Biblical Analysis:

Frustration begins when our human expectations meet resistant reality. Moses expected the Israelites, after witnessing the Red Sea crossing, manna from heaven, and pillar of cloud guidance, to develop unwavering faith. Instead, they complained: "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" (Numbers 20:4-5).

Cross References:

- Proverbs 13:12: Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.
- Jeremiah 17:9: The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

Psychological Insight: Viktor Frankl observed, "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." This "space" is where frustration either masters us or we master it through spiritual discipline.

Religious Quote: A.W. Tozer noted, "Refuse to be discouraged. Discouragement is itself a sin." He recognized that unchecked frustration often leads to a

discouraged heart that questions God's goodness.

## **2. THE DANGEROUS PROGRESSION: FROM INTERNAL STIRRING TO OUTWARD SIN**

Biblical Analysis: Moses internal agitation "Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the entrance of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces" - Numbers 20:6) turned into public anger ("Hear now, you rebels!" - 20:10) and finally to direct disobedience (striking instead of speaking to the rock - 20:11).

Cross References:

- James 1:14-15: But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

- Ephesians 4:26-27: Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.

Psychological Insight: Dr. Henry Cloud explains, "We change our behavior when the pain of staying the same becomes greater than the pain of changing. Consequences give us the pain that motivates us to change." Moses experienced severe consequences that should warn us of frustration's progression.

Religious Quote: Puritan theologian John Owen wrote, "Be killing sin or it will be killing you." Unchecked frustration is a sin that kills our witness, peace, and obedience.

## **3. THE CORE SPIRITUAL DANGER: MISREPRESENTING GOD'S CHARACTER**

Biblical Analysis: God's judgment reveals the deepest issue: "Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them" (Numbers 20:12). Moses frustration caused him to present God as harsh and insufficient rather than holy and sufficient.

Cross References:

- Isaiah 29:16: You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the

clay, that the thing made should say of its maker, He did not make me; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, He has no understanding

· 1 Peter 1:15-16: But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, You shall be holy, for I am holy.

Psychological Insight: Martin Seligman's research on "learned helplessness" shows how frustration can create a mindset that no actions matter. Spiritually, this manifests as functional atheism—living as if God cannot or will not act.

Religious Quote: Charles Spurgeon declared, "Trials teach us what we are; they dig up the soil, and let us see what we are made of." Our response to frustration reveals whether we fundamentally trust God's character.

## **4. THE REDEMPTIVE ALTERNATIVE: VENTING VERTICALLY, NOT HORIZONTALLY**

Biblical Analysis: Before Meribah, Moses successfully interceded for Israel after the golden calf incident (Exodus 32:11-14). He took their rebellion vertically to God rather than horizontally against them. The Psalms model this vertical venting repeatedly.

Cross References:

· Psalm 62:8: Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.

· Philippians 4:6-7: Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Psychological Insight: Dr. John Gottman's research on relationships identifies "harsh startups" as predictors of conflict. Spiritual translation: Taking frustrations directly to God first creates space for grace before addressing people.

Religious Quote: Tim Keller explained, "Prayer is the way to experience a powerful confidence that God is handling our lives well, that our bad things will turn out for good, our good things cannot be taken from us, and the best things are yet to come."

## **5. THE PATH TO RECOVERY: HUMILITY, GRACE, AND**

# FORWARD MOVEMENT

**Biblical Analysis:** Though Moses faced consequences (not entering Canaan), God still graciously provided water (Numbers 20:11). Later, God showed Moses the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 34:1-4) and personally buried him (Deuteronomy 34:6). Grace meets us in our failure while consequences teach us.

## Cross References:

· 1 John 1:9: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

· Isaiah 43:18-19: Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

**Psychological Insight:** Dr. Brené Brown's research shows that "vulnerability is the birthplace of innovation, creativity and change." Spiritual humility before God—admitting our frustrated failures—creates space for new growth.

**Religious Quote:** Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote from prison, "We must learn to regard people less in light of what they do or omit to do, and more in the light of what they suffer." This shift from judgment to compassion breaks frustration's cycle.

## Practical Applications for This Week:

1. Identify one recurrent frustration and write down the specific expectation behind it.
2. Memorize Ephesians 4:26-27 as an "escalation interrupter."
3. Practice "vertical venting" each morning with honest Psalms-based prayer.
4. Ask yourself when frustrated: "Does my reaction honor God as holy?"
5. Extend specific grace to someone whose behavior typically frustrates you.

Frustration isn't merely an emotional experience—it's a spiritual crossroads where we choose between self-reliance and God-dependence. Moses story serves as both warning and invitation: though frustration can derail even the most faithful, God's redemptive purposes continue, offering new mercies each morning.

