

Numbers.

(Don't worry, we'll get through the math together.)

^ Week 2 – Parabola ^

Check-in

How are you? Where have you seen Christ working in your life in the last week? And... as we saw last week in the Book of Numbers, the Israelites have been complaining, mostly about food. What's one thing that you love that most people hate to eat, or hate that most people love? Let the food fight begin.

Opening Prayer

God of Sustenance, open our eyes to see where you are providing for us even when we are heading in the wrong direction.

Introduction

Welcome to week 2 of our series on Numbers... yes, both the Book of the Bible and “the maths,” (as the British say.) And, whereas we realize just hearing the word “math” might cause you heart palpitations, don't worry... the math is just a metaphor to help us with the story. Let's

recap... the Book of Numbers in the Bible takes place after the Israelites have escaped their captivity in Egypt, but before they reach the Promised Land, modern day Israel. For 40 years, they wander through the wilderness. This is where the Book of Numbers takes place. And yes, it is full of boring census data, laws, and rules for organizing their society. But in amongst the tedium are powerful stories that, as they were trudging through their wilderness, can help us get through the wilderness times in our lives. But first...

Recap Question: Last week we talked about how Moses dealt with the negativity around him, specifically the complaints of the people. He got humble and admitted he couldn't carry the burden himself. And he got help, sharing the burden with others who lightened his load. How did you do this past week getting humble and getting help?

Scripture

We left the Israelites last week complaining about not having meat to eat. Turns out, God hears their cries and provides them with quail, which shuts them up... for a while. But in the 9 chapters between last week's story and the one we'll look at today, they rebel a few times, threaten to mutiny and kill Moses, and bring upon themselves numerous plagues. You know, the usual. The nation of Israel is still a mess. Which brings us to our story for today. We're not entirely sure how long they've been in the wilderness at this point, at least one year, less than 40. That's all we know. But, we're far enough removed

from their desire for meat that they now are complaining about something different.

Read Numbers, chapter 20, verses 1 to 11.

Last time they were longing for cucumbers, melons, leeks, garlic, and onions. Now they're longing for quinoa, figs, grapes, and pomegranates. (It's like they're hungry for a salad from Panera.) The figs and grapes and pomegranates might be a little much, but not having access to water is a big deal... and might be their first legitimate complaint. Water is necessary for life. If Moses and Aaron don't do something, people will die. But rather than trust God to provide for them, the Israelites grow more and more discontent. Their pessimism is taking them in a negative direction. "We were better off as slaves. We were better off in captivity. Heck, we were better off dead, Moses. Why did you bring us here?" (v3-5 paraphrased.) This new independent nation they've built is on the verge of collapse. If Moses is going to lead these people through their wilderness, he needs to get them headed back in a positive direction.

Question 2: Discuss the story. Where do you see yourself? Are you one of the Israelites, finding yourself bemoaning your situation, wanting someone else to fix it? Are you Moses, fielding endless complaints, unsure how you'll ever satisfy the complainers? Or are you God in this, looking down upon the circus, shaking your head, wondering when they'll ever figure it out without your help?

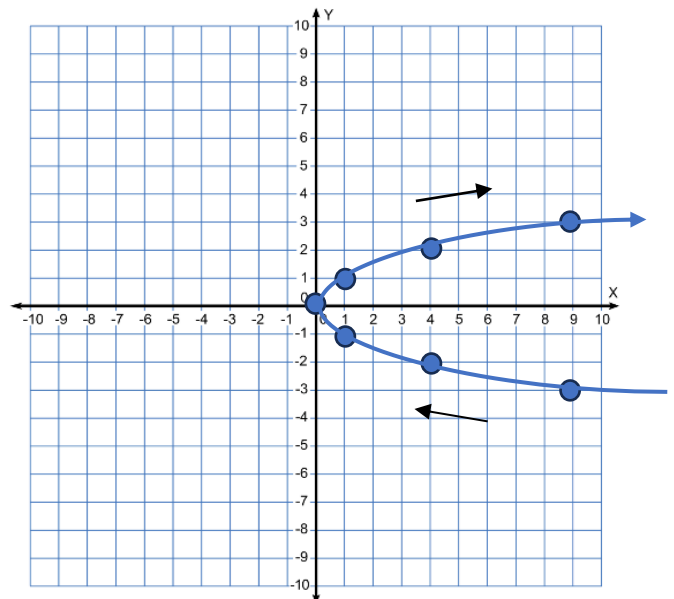
Reflection

The Israelites were headed in a negative direction, and Moses has to turn it around. How? Well, for that, we turn to math. This week, we're graphing equations! (Deep breaths, you'll be fine.) Take a look at the grid to the right. From the center, positive numbers go up and to the right. Negative numbers go left, and down. You can use the letter 'x' to represent the horizontal numbers, and the letter 'y' to represent the vertical, like this: (x , y). Now, here's where things get fun... yes, fun. You can build relationships between the horizontal and vertical numbers through equations. And the equation we're going to use today is:

$$x = y^2$$

If we put in numbers for y, we get numbers for x, and can put them onto our graph. For example, if we put -3 into our equation for y, $-3^2 = 9$, giving the point, (9 , -3). So, on our graph, we go right 9 from the center, and down 3. If we keep putting in numbers for y, we get points at (-2,4), (-1, 1), (0,0), (1,1), (2,4), and (3,9), as you can see on the graph... and a pattern start to take shape. Draw a line to connect them, and we get a shape called a...

^ Parabola ^



Here's why graphing this equation is important. Look at the arrows. When the y 's were negative, the line is headed in a negative direction. When the y 's become positive, the line turns and heads back in the positive direction.

Moses needs a parabola for his people. If they are to have any hope of getting through their wilderness, he needs to help them stop the negativity, the backward direction, the defeatist thinking, and get them moving forward. And the first step, like any math question, is to...

^ Identify the Problem ^

Our problem... graph $x = y^2$. Easily identified. For the Israelites, the problem was twofold. First, in verse 5, we again hear their common refrain, "why did you bring us out of Egypt?" They simply cannot let go of the past. When they were *in* captivity, no one asked that question. They *all* wanted out. But now, even though Egypt meant oppression and slavery, they want to go back. As we are wandering through our wilderness times in life, what keeps us headed in the wrong direction? It might be that we can't let go of something in our past. We hold on to an old relationship, an old habit, an old way of life. Some- times we hold onto pain or regret, and that inability to let go of the past keeps us in our wilderness.

The second problem that is keeping the Israelites headed in the negative direction is that they're never satisfied. Last week, they got

manna, but they wanted meat and a salad. This week, they ask for water... but also quinoa and a fruit tray. They never seem to be satisfied. How often are we like the Israelites? (The answer is... all too often.) It's okay to be ambitious. It's okay to make a better life for yourself. But if you're never satisfied with what you have, you will always be moving in a negative direction. You'll never make your parabola and get out of your wilderness.

Question 3: Discuss the two issues that, like the Israelites, might be keeping us headed in a negative direction. First, is there something in your past, an old life or situation, that you cannot let go of? And then second, how satisfied would you say you are with your life? (Disclaimer: The question of "satisfaction" doesn't mean we need to simply accept pain or abuse. It's necessary to get out of harmful situations. This question applies only to the desire for what we don't need, rather than being thankful for what we have.)

After we identify the problem, we need to...

^ Identify the Solution ^

In our math problem, we started putting numbers into our equation and putting them on the graph, working towards the solution. The solution for Moses? He goes to God again, just as he did with their complaint for meat. But this time he does something different. Instead of relaying the complaint, (and complaining himself,) he and Aaron fall at God's feet, but they don't say a word. They simply listen.

Last week, it was about being humble enough to admit that we can't get through the wilderness on our own. This week, as we're looking for solutions, it's about being quiet, and listening for God's voice. For Moses and Aaron, God comes through and offers a solution. How often do we simply complain to God about the situation, resign to return to a past life that was satisfying either, or beg someone else to solve our problem? If we're going to make a parabola and get headed back in the right direction, we need to stop the noise, fall at God's feet, and listen.

Question 4: How good are you at stopping to listen for God's voice? On a scale of "I'm like the Israelites who whine and are never satisfied" to "I'm perfectly in tune with the Divine and listen for every solution"... where do you fall? What would make it easier to listen for God's voice?

Closing

The final step of any math problem is to...

^ Show Your Work ^

Yes, you have to show your work. After we put our points on the graph, we had to draw the line. Moses did as God told him. He struck the rock and poured out water for the people. This tells us two things. First, God gives them what they *need*, not what they *think* they need. The Israelites get what they need to live, water, not the fruit salad they

requested. Second, God could have simply made it rain. But that's a natural source they could have explained away as something other than God's provision. Instead, the water comes from an impossible place, so that they would *know* it was God's provision. So, if you feel like you're headed in the wrong direction, stuck in your wilderness... graph yourself a parabola for life. First, identify the problem... like the Israelites, maybe you're holding onto the past or simply unsatisfied with what you've been given. Second, identify the solution... throwing yourself at God's feet, and then listening for God's voice. And then show your work, graph that equation by keeping your head up, looking for God to provide what you *need*, knowing that the provision might just come from what seems like an impossible source.

**Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations.
Close in prayer.**