

Numbers.

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

| Week 1 – Absolute Value |

Check-in

How are you? Where have you seen Christ working in your life in the last week? And... for this series, we'll be looking at stories from a book in the Bible that is essentially the Ancestry.com of the Israelite people. So, have you investigated the genealogy of your family? If so, share a fun fact.

Opening Prayer

God of Provision, give us the humility to admit we can't carry our burdens alone, and then the courage to get the help we need.

Introduction

God is a math geek. It's true. When you dive into the intricacies of how our universe is built, (don't worry, we won't...) you witness the brilliance of its design. And the code that facilitates that design is math.

The cosmos is created by numbers. Okay, before you check out... numbers will only be part of our equation. There's another Numbers that will be the forefront of this series... the fifth book of the Bible, titled, "Numbers." We'll get into why later. First...

Warmup Question: Though this series isn't truly about math, it *is* about Numbers. So, fun starter... what's your take on the maths? Does it add up for you, or are you divided on the subject? Are you a math-lete? Or do you find it exponentially frustrating?

Series Setup

Here's your set up. About 3500 years ago, the Israelite people were enslaved in Egypt. The Pharaoh had made life hard for them, and they longed to be free. Enter the hero of our story, Moses. Moses is empowered by God to go and demand that the Pharaoh let his people go. After a messy run of plagues, Pharaoh agrees... and the Israelites bail and make a dramatic escape. (As homework, go watch the 1998 DreamWorks animated adaptation, "Prince of Egypt," with Val Kilmer as both Moses *and* God... it's special.) They begin to build their community in the wilderness between Egypt and modern-day Israel.

This is where the book of Numbers takes place... in the time of Moses, after the Exodus on the Israelites journey through the desert to the Promised Land. In fact, the Hebrew people called this book, *Bemidbar*, which means "in the wilderness." We call it *Numbers* because it's the Ancestry.com of the Israelite people. It's a mix of the

stories of this time in their history and also all the census data they had to collect as they were organizing themselves as a new people, a free people, away from Egypt. But, amongst all these numbers and math are some powerful stories that can help us on our journey through our own wilderness.

Question 1: The first 5 books of the Bible are called the Pentateuch, (which means “5 books.” I know... creative.) *Numbers* is number 4. (5 bonus points for the first person to name the first 5 books.) What is your experience with this part of the Bible? Have you read it? If so, what are your thoughts about it? Got a favorite story?

Scripture

The people were not happy. In fact, a better name for the book might be, “Israel’s Temper-Tantrum.” (Not sure that translates into Hebrew.) It had been at least a year since they’d left Egypt, and life in the wilderness was rough. They didn’t have much in the way of food or water. They were nomadic. There was no structure or rules. So, the old life back in Egypt, even though it was captivity, was starting to look kinda good. They had been oppressed and had to work hard, sure, but they had houses, and food, and drink, and a sense of security. And that’s where we pick up our story for today...

Read Numbers, chapter 11, verses 1 to 10.

Yes, “whining.” (You know how sometimes Pastor Mike gives you the literal translation in Hebrew, because the English doesn’t capture the

whole story and the literal translation offers keen insight? Not this time... the Hebrew word literally means, “whining.”) Moses is trying to set up a society, devise laws, and uphold an entire religion, and the people are complaining about leeks... (the food.) He’s fed up. He doesn’t have time for petty negativity. And he’s at his wits end. We often feel like Moses. We have our priority lists and regularly feel like we’re only barely keeping our heads above water. And yet, negativity wraps itself around our ankles and tries to pull us under.

Question 2: What are the sources of negativity in your life? It’s hard enough holding up the big things, without the little, insignificant things adding to the weight load. When you’re just trying to manage, what is the “whining” that tries to drag you under?

Reflection

Just like the Israelites, we have times in our lives when we feel like we’re journeying through our own wilderness. And just as Moses did, we have to learn to deal with the negativity that weighs us down as we try to manage the priorities. So, how do we lose the negative and keep the positive? For that, let’s turn to the other *numbers*... math. (Don’t worry, we’ll get through it together.)

As you hopefully know, there are positive and negative numbers. Well, math has a simple operation that turns a negative number into a positive with the effective use of vertical lines. It looks like this:

$$|-x| = x$$

If a number is negative, put those vertical lines around it, it comes out on the other side positive. This operation is called...

| Absolute Value |

The absolute value of -1 is 1. The absolute value of -5 is 5. You just drop the negative. See? Easy stuff. And the good news? We have an “absolute value” operation for life. There’s a way to lose the negative and keep the positive. For that, we turn back to Moses.

Read Numbers, chapter 11, verses 11 to 15.

Okay, Moses gets a little dramatic here. But right before he goes all telenovela on us, there’s a great little nugget in there that is Part 1 of Moses’s Absolute Value function for losing the negative in life. In verse 14, he says, “I can’t carry all these people by myself.” (NLT) Moses admits he can’t do it on his own. So, the first step of his absolute value function for losing the negative was to...

| Get Humble |

We have to recognize and accept that the burden is too heavy for us to carry on our own. The weight is too great. The negativity is out of

our ability to manage. And the more we fight it, the more it overwhelms us and drags us below the surface. But when we humble ourselves, go to God with a little honesty, and say, “God, I can’t do it on my own,” we unburden on our souls. That takes humility.

But, humility is not enough. We can admit we can’t do it on our own, but then get stubborn and still *try* to do it on our own. (No one does that, right? Right.) So, step 2 for Life’s Absolute Value function is to...

| Get Help |

Moses could have stayed in his own “pity party” and not gotten help. Sure, he admitted he can’t do it on his own. And whereas that’s a good start, and it can unburden our souls just to pray that prayer... if there’s no practical action step afterwards, it doesn’t fix the problem.

Read Numbers, chapter 11, verses 16 to 17.

God meets Moses with a practical solution so he “won’t have to carry [the burden] alone.” Moses *gets humble* and then he *gets help*... he unburdens his soul, then he unburdens his actual problem, thus losing the negative. And it works. Later in verse 29, when he’s approached by someone who was concerned that these 70 dudes were overstepping their bounds, Moses responds with a smile and

says, "I only wish it were more than 70." He's happy about it. He's lost the negative.

Question 3: Discuss these two steps of Life's Absolute Value Function. Which is easier for you to do? Go back to your answer to question 2... how would you employ these steps in that situation?

Closing

If we feel like we are so burdened by negativity in our lives that we are drowning, we need to employ our absolute value formula. 1) Get humble. Go to God and admit you can't fight the negativity on your own. Lay that burden at God's feet, just as Moses did, in humility. And then, get help... God had to remind Moses to go find 70 dudes to help him carry the burden. The good news? You have a family of love and support here that will help you carry your burden. That's what this faith community is there for. We're not therapists or counselors... just people who truly care and want to help you carry your burden.

So, how do we lose the negative in our lives? With our very own Absolute Value formula, as shown to us by Moses... Get humble... and get help. And you thought you'd never use that high school math again.

Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations.

Close in prayer.