

- We are almost at the end of our Lessons from the Desert series.
  - We have been looking at the wanderings of the Israelites as a metaphor for those desperate places, those times of in-between, those tough times, that we all go through that are fertile ground for transformation.
  - We have the benefit of not only learning from our mistakes, but we can learn from the mistakes of those in the biblical narrative such as the Israelites. We can learn from the needless pain in *their* lives.
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- Up until now, we have looked at what we believe while in the desert and how we respond to our desert circumstances. It doesn't help us to complain, but rather we are to lament when necessary, walk in community together, building trust in that God who sees.
  - What we find is that the desert is fertile ground for transformation. It is also fertile ground for God's discipline.
  - Ronnie is a 10<sup>th</sup> grade basketball player – full of potential. One day, the JV coach asked to see him. He was leading team in scoring and rebounding. 6'6". He has uncommon agility and coordination. He was good without even working at it, and that was the problem. He wasn't working at it. Discipline was a problem. He would show up late. He had just missed a mandatory meeting because he "forgot". When he was coached he rolled his eyes and acted as though he was immune to correction.
  - Ronnie showed up, surprised to see varsity coach as well. "Outstanding player with a lot of potential. Unwillingness to receive correction, refusal to arrive on time, and contempt for coaching staff is poisoning the team. You will be benched for the next two games. You will dress and warm up but you will not play, even if behind." Varsity weighed in. "I have been watching you. Your talent is unquestionable. If you attitude does not change, you will not be playing for me on the varsity team next year. Am I clear?"
  - Ronnie might feel like the coach is trying to destroy his season, but the mature observer recognizes that the coach is disciplining Ronnie in an attempt to rescue not only this season, but potentially his entire future in team sports.
  - Good discipline inflicts pain in order to save or rescue something. When God disciplines us in ways that seem harsh or difficult to bear, could be that he is attempting to rescue something.
  - **GOD'S DISCIPLINE IS A GIFT FROM HIM.**
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- Part of the problem we have in the desert is that we often make the desert more painful than it needs to be. Our actions, reactions and overreactions to our desert experience can compound our situation.
  - The desert is difficult terrain and make it exceedingly more difficult when our patience dwindles, and we demand what God respond in our timing and on our terms.
  - When we recognize and understand God's discipline, it can be very helpful as we spend time in the desert.
  - Let's go back to the story that we looked at earlier in our journeys.  
*Numbers 11:18 "Tell the people: 'Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow, when you will eat meat. The LORD heard you when you wailed, "If only we had meat to eat! We were better off in Egypt!" Now the LORD will give you meat, and you will eat it. 19 You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, or five, ten or twenty days, 20 but for a whole month – until it comes out of your nostrils and you loathe it – because you have rejected the LORD, who is among you, and have wailed before him, saying, "Why did we ever leave Egypt?"' "* 21 *But Moses said, "Here I am among six hundred thousand men on foot, and you say, 'I will give them meat to eat for a whole month!' 22 Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for them? Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them?"*

23 The LORD answered Moses, "Is the LORD's arm too short? Now you will see whether or not what I say will come true for you."

- As a child, I remember hearing the story of how God provided for the people. He gave them bread and meat. Manna and quail. It was wonderful. It was used as the text to demonstrate that God listens (which he does) and that he provides (which he did).
- But probably the most important part of the story is what happens next and was never included in my childhood stories.

31 Now a wind went out from the LORD and drove quail in from the sea. It scattered them up to two cubits deep all around the camp, as far as a day's walk in any direction. 32 All that day and night and all the next day the people went out and gathered quail. No one gathered less than ten homers. Then they spread them out all around the camp. 33 But while the meat was still between their teeth and before it could be consumed, the anger of the LORD burned against the people, and he struck them with a severe plague. 34 Therefore the place was named Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had craved other food.

- Sit with that for a minute. Does that make you uncomfortable?
- How does that fit with our view of Jesus from the NT?
- Doesn't this seem a little . . . excessive? They complain and want different food so God kills a bunch of them. What is going on here?

## I. God desires us to learn from mistakes.

- We have to step back a bit to see what is really going on here. What is the real problem here?
- We get a clue in God's response to their complaint.

18 The LORD heard you when you wailed, "If only we had meat to eat! We were better off in Egypt!" Now the LORD will give you meat, and you will eat it. 19 You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, or five, ten or twenty days, 20 but for a whole month – until it comes out of your nostrils and you loathe it – because you have rejected the LORD, who is among you, and have wailed before him, saying, "Why did we ever leave Egypt?"

- Twice they mention Egypt. We were better off there. We shouldn't have left.
- Their complaint is that they were better off without God.
- This is not simply a complaint about wanting better food. The crime really is treason.
- Consider this. They followed a pillar of fire and cloud. They had met with him on Mount Sinai. He had spoken his words to them. The whole camp was arranged with 3 tribes in each corner and the tabernacle in the middle which was the seat of God's presence among them. Visible. Tangible.

*you have rejected the LORD, who is among you*

- Their rebellion here is part of a long history of rebellion. It was not an isolated incident.
- Trust is the glue that holds any relationship together. God is trying to develop a relationship of trust – instead the hardship intended to build trust results in contemptuous complaint.
- "The tragedy is not that we make mistakes but that we are prone to make the same mistakes. The heartache is not that we experience pain but that so much of our pain goes wasted when we refuse to learn from it." (The Land Between, p139)
- God desires for us to learn from mistakes.
- **GOD'S DISCIPLINE IS A GIFT FROM HIM.**
- There is another thing going on in this story. They are not at the beginning of the journey. They are near the end of the journey but are still acting like they were at the beginning.
- This incident with the quail happens shortly before the saddest account in the entire account of the wanderings of the Israelites.
- They reached a place called Kadesh. Right on the border of the Promised Land.

- It's the goal. It's what the last two years have been all about. It was the promise. It is the fulfillment of everything that God had promised starting with Abraham. They are so close they can taste it.
- Moses sends out 12 spies to check out the land. They are gone for 40 days and come back with their report.

*Numbers 13:26 They reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land. 27 They gave Moses this account: "We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. 28 But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. 29 The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan." 30 Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it." 31 But the men who had gone up with him said, "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are." 32 And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, "The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. 33 We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."*

- As we read on, the people complain. They grumble. They turn on Moses and Aaron. Despite Moses pleas, the people rebel.
- The result is catastrophic. God judges the entire nation. NONE of them will go in the Promised Land. They will wander the desert for 40 years, one for each day the spies were gone, until they all die. Their kids will get the land, but they will never experience what was theirs to have.
- Their response to God's discipline in the desert should sober us. But it should also give us hope.

## **II. God uses pain redemptively.**

- God is never into pain for pain sake.
- Whenever God disciplines, when he uses painful seasons, it is ALWAYS with a view to redemption.
- Anyone who works out in the morning when it is 6F out understands the idea of redemptive pain. There is pain that must be endured for a better future.
- Pain is something we willingly embrace when we believe it will serve a helpful purpose.
- I wonder if God was willing to inflict great pain to prevent astronomical pain. The harsh punishment with the quail had been intended to rescue the whole operation.
- They weren't trusting him. They weren't changing. So God raised the stakes. Not because he got more and more angry. He did not want them to miss out on the very thing he was attempting to develop them for.
- Good parents understand the stakes. If we fail to correct certain weaknesses of character, the stakes would only get higher with time.
- Left to themselves, self-centered children have a way of becoming narcissistic employees, husbands and wives. The goal of discipline is to correct behavior when the stakes are low.
- When we are in the desert, pay attention. What is going on? Do you find yourself blaming everyone around you for your problems? Blaming God? Just doing what you've always done? Are there patterns or communicating or responding that need to change? Are their habits that need to be altered? Are their blind spots that need to be exposed?
- Only God knows our future and what lies ahead. He wants us to be equipped for it. He wants us to grow into the people he intends us to be, not controlled by character deficits but having the strength of Christlike character.

- **GOD'S DISCIPLINE IS A GIFT FROM HIM.**
- God intends for that pain in your life to bring about his purposes. Don't waste it!

### III. Discipline is a mark of God's goodness.

- While it has some limitations, how we deal with our children is a wonderful picture of what God often is trying to do with us.
- When I punished or withheld things from my children growing up, the purpose was not to be mean to them. They may have taken it that way, but that was never the purpose.
- I still remember the first time one of my children threw a temper tantrum. They were young, and in some ways it was kind of cute, but I thought into the future. This is the kind of behavior that would only get worse and as they got older, would have far greater ramifications.
- I needed to deal with now, not because I was mean, but because I wanted to develop something in them for the future. Something good.

*13 Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish them with the rod, they will not die.*

*14 Punish them with the rod and save them from death.*

- It sounds harsh, but in the context of that day, it was not hyperbole. In a society that relied on family to survive, it was crucial. When several days could mean the difference between the crop being sown or harvested. When the loss of a crop could mean going into debt and running the risk of having to sell your children into slavery. When the entire well being of multiple generations of family, living together, could be jeopardized by laziness, it was way better for the child to get them out of bed with the rod than it was to overlook the problem.
  - In fact, if a parent refused to discipline a child, it was noted as a form of passive hatred.
- Proverbs 13:24 Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them.*
- Discipline is a mark of the goodness of God. *"Discipline is the activity of inflicting pain for redemptive purposes, and it is something for which God is to be admired, appreciated and esteemed."* (The Land Between, p135)
  - Shouldn't there be space in our thinking for a gracious God who reserves the right to dispense discipline as he sees fit?
  - He loves us enough to bring us discomfort to rescue us from attitudes, traits and habits that will derail our growth and his work in our lives.

- **GOD'S DISCIPLINE IS A GIFT FROM HIM.**

*Hebrews 12:11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.*

- What is the purpose of discipline? To produce righteousness and peace.
- When we pay attention and embrace God's discipline, it will always take us towards righteousness and peace.
- God desires for us to learn from our mistakes.
- He uses the pain of our desert experiences, whether we caused it, or it happened outside our control, or some combination of the two, for redemptive purposes.
- He does this because he is loving, gracious God who wants the best for you.

- I was reading in my quiet time this week Psalm 106 and in light of what we have been studying, it seemed to really stand out and I want to conclude with it.

*Psalm 106:7 When our ancestors were in Egypt, they gave no thought to your miracles; they did not remember your many kindnesses, and they rebelled by the sea, the Red Sea. 8 Yet he saved them for his name's sake, to make his mighty power known. 9 He rebuked the Red Sea,*

*and it dried up; he led them through the depths as through a desert. 10 He saved them from the hand of the foe; from the hand of the enemy he redeemed them. 11 The waters covered their adversaries; not one of them survived. 12 Then they believed his promises and sang his praise.*

*13 But they soon forgot what he had done and did not wait for his plan to unfold. 14 In the desert they gave in to their craving; in the wilderness they put God to the test. 15 So he gave them what they asked for, but sent a wasting disease among them.*

*16 In the camp they grew envious of Moses and of Aaron, who was consecrated to the LORD. 17 The earth opened up and swallowed Dathan; it buried the company of Abiram. 18 Fire blazed among their followers; a flame consumed the wicked.*

*19 At Horeb they made a calf and worshiped an idol cast from metal. 20 They exchanged their glorious God for an image of a bull, which eats grass. 21 They forgot the God who saved them, who had done great things in Egypt, 22 miracles in the land of Ham and awesome deeds by the Red Sea. 23 So he said he would destroy them – had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him to keep his wrath from destroying them.*

*24 Then they despised the pleasant land; they did not believe his promise. 25 They grumbled in their tents and did not obey the LORD. 26 So he swore to them with uplifted hand that he would make them fall in the wilderness, 27 make their descendants fall among the nations and scatter them throughout the lands.*

*28 They yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor and ate sacrifices offered to lifeless gods; 29 they aroused the LORD's anger by their wicked deeds, and a plague broke out among them. 30 But Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was checked. 31 This was credited to him as righteousness for endless generations to come.*

*32 By the waters of Meribah they angered the LORD, and trouble came to Moses because of them; 33 for they rebelled against the Spirit of God, and rash words came from Moses' lips.*

- There is more about how their patterns of living continued even after then came into the Promised Land.
- They did not learn from their mistakes. God's discipline was ignored and it led to this story, told many years later.
- The writer ends like this.

*47 Save us, LORD our God, and gather us from the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise.*

- What would the story of your desert experience look like if someone was writing about it.
- You get to decide what it looks like.
- Will you embrace the discipline of God as loving and redemptive, or will you stubbornly refuse to listen and change.
- **GOD'S DISCIPLINE IS A GIFT FROM HIM.**
- Accept it!