

Exodus 17:1-7
1 Corinthians 10:1-6
Whining in the Wilderness
WRCoB 10.09.22

Reading through the Book of Exodus
You'll quickly notice people complaining.

We heard them griping on the shores of the Red Sea:

Exodus 14:11 NIV Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?

After the Red Sea episode
Moses led the people into the wilderness of Shur.

Three days into their journey the people starting in again.

Mind you, three days after their miraculous escape!!

Hey, the water doesn't taste right!
It has a bitter taste!
It's not like the water in Egypt!
We can't drink this water!

Moses turns to God, "God, help me!"
God sweetens the water.

Six weeks later, here they are again, complaining

Exodus 16:3 NLT
³ "If only the Lord had killed us back in Egypt," they moaned. "There we sat around pots filled with meat and ate all the bread we wanted. But now you have brought us into this wilderness to starve us all to death."

The bread is stale! The bananas are black and smushed!

We can't eat this stuff.

Again, Moses turns to God.

The following morning heavenly manna falls from the sky.

Moses had to remind them again and again
That just as God could be trusted
To save them from slavery
To save them at the Red Sea

God can be trusted to see them through the wilderness.

But human nature is what human nature is!

And they quickly forgot.

It's easy to whine in the wilderness.

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In today's Scripture Lesson the people of Israel
Journey out from the Desert of Sin.

Now there's a name!

They set up camp at Rephidim.

But there was no water there.

Now any good Boy Scout knows
It's probably not the smartest thing
To set up camp for over a million campers
Without an ample water supply.

What no water?

I need to do a load of laundry
I got kids in the same underwear for a week.

Here they go again.

Exodus 17:3 NLT

³“Why did you bring us out of Egypt? Are you trying to kill us, our children, and our livestock with thirst?”

Moses, pulling his hair out, once again turns to God.

Exodus 17:4 “What am I going to do with these people?”

God tells Moses to strike a rock with his staff
And water will come gushing out.

He did! And it did!

And now you know
How the science of fracking began!

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The Apostle Paul in our NT passage today
Reminds us that God provided for the Israelites
As they journeyed in the wilderness.

That even though God was with them
And provided for their daily needs
The people bitterly complained.

Paul says, perhaps, there's a lesson here for us!

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The wilderness is the period of time it takes
To go from one place to the next
Whether that place is a physical or emotional place

As I quoted Michael Walzer last week
The Exodus teaches us three things.

We all live in bondage in a place called Egypt
But we know there's a place called the Promised Land.

But to get there we have to go through the wilderness

And like the Israelites, our initial urge is to complain.

Jeff Manion, in his book,

The Land Between: Finding God in Difficult Transitions

Uses the wilderness experience as a metaphor.

He writes.

Generally, you don't have to extend an invitation for complaint to show up. It arrives as an uninvited guest.

You return home from yet another frustrating day to discover that complaint has moved into your guest room, unpacked its luggage, started a load of laundry, and is rooting through your fridge.

Even as you seek to dislodge complaint—as you move its bags to the curb and change the locks—it crawls back through the guest room window. Complaint resists eviction.

With every struggle, we become the Israelites murmuring in the desert. We miss the faith lessons. God desires to prepare us and build things into us, but we are hunkered down in our pattern of response.

The Israelites travel through the wilderness

Toward their new home in Canaan.

It should be an occasion to celebrate their liberation.

After 400 years of slavery

You'd think their gratefulness

Would last for more than three days!

But most people hate change.

Even knowing the change would be a positive thing.

Transitions are the in-between times.

Between “The life I once lived”
And “the life that I hope to live”
If only I can get through the wilderness.

Have you been there?

When we are in the wilderness
We long for the familiarity of the old life
Even though we were in bondage.

ANYTHING seems better than the pain of transition.

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Isn't that why abused wives stay with their husbands?

Isn't that why we live with our addictions?

Isn't that why we suffer through bad situations?

Because it is more difficult to change
Than it is to put up with current conditions.

Another example is found in the movie
Shawshack Redemption.

An old-timer is released after years of incarceration.

He hangs himself unable to make the transition
From prison to freedom.

The present circumstances become intolerable.

We can't go back
And it's too difficult to move forward.

And yet, in reality, the longer we complain
The longer we push back
The longer we avoid it

The more twists and turns we will find
On the road leading out of the wilderness
Into the Promised Land.

It took the Israelites 40 years.

Let's hope it doesn't that long for those of us in transition!

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The Exodus gives us insight
Into our own experiences in difficult transitions.

What difficult transitions are you in?

Caring for parents in declining health while raising children?

That's called the sandwich generation.

How about the club sandwich generation?

That's when you care for aging parents
While caring for adult children
While helping to raise grandchildren.

Other transitions include

- Loss of a loved one
- Health-related issues, you or someone you love
- Unemployment or between jobs
- Divorce
- Post-graduate uncertainty
- Retirement
- Empty-nest syndrome
- A major move

The list goes on.

Many of us are living in the wilderness.

All of us will journey through it at some point.

From the familiar “what used to be”
Through the stress--filled “what is now”
To the longed-for peace of “what will be.”

It’s easy to whine in the wilderness.

We can empathize with the Israelites.

When we’re going through it
It’s hard to recognize God with us.

It’s hard to see God
Who meets our daily needs
Giving hope, guidance, and encouragement.

We begin to doubt God’s goodness.

Transitional times will either build up or tear-down
A person’s faith and spiritual stamina.

Manion: *The wilderness where faith can thrive is the very
desert where it can dry up and die if we are not watchful.*

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It’s what we do in the wilderness
That produces the quality of character God seeks.

How we handle the difficult transitions
Some of which can take days, months, or even years
Determines the trust levels we have in God.

We can kick out the uninvited guest, the whiner
By inviting another guest to move in with us.

Trust!

*When we choose to trust in the face of deep disappointment,
complaint has less space to maneuver.*

*While attempting to unpack for an extended stay, [complaint]
discovers that trust has taken all the drawers in the guest
room and already occupies the empty seat at the table.*

*Trust evicts complaint. Trust and complaint are incompatible
roommates. One inevitably pushes the other one out.*

God intends wilderness experiences
To transition people of bondage
To people of God.

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You've heard the expression

God never closes a door without opening another one.

Well, that may be true.

But it's the hallway in between
That can give us trouble!

But rather than whining in the wilderness

Our lesson can teach us three simple lessons.

1. If you don't pursue what you want, you'll never get it!
2. If you don't ask, the answer is always no!
3. If you don't step forward, you're always in the same place.

Remember, whether you like it or not
The only constant in life is change.

When going through difficult transitions remain trusting God.

God will provide.

You just need to ask!

Remember, too, during times of change and transition
Surround yourself with people who have your back.

Let them know you need them in this difficult time.

Don't feel like you have to experience
The wilderness by yourself.

Ask them to walk with you.

Finally, see transition as a positive thing
From bondage to freedom.

And stop whining. You got this!

Jeremiah 29:11 NRSVUE

11 For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.