

**Exodus 16:2-15**

<sup>2</sup>The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup>The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." <sup>4</sup>Then the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. <sup>5</sup>On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days."

<sup>6</sup>So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, <sup>7</sup>and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your complaining against the Lord. For what are we, that you complain against us?" <sup>8</sup>And Moses said, "When the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the Lord has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but" against the Lord. <sup>9</sup>Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining.'" <sup>10</sup>And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. <sup>11</sup>The Lord spoke to Moses and said, <sup>12</sup>"I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.'"

<sup>13</sup>In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. <sup>14</sup>When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. <sup>15</sup>When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat."

Have you ever reflected on what you complain about. Any volunteers? The Bible calls it - murmuring. What a nice euphemism for grumbling. What does complaining and grumbling get you? Sometimes it's rather fun to complain and grumble. There's a certain satisfaction of righteous grumbling. It can build solidarity with other grumblers. One of my favorite characters is Eeyore from **Winnie the Pooh**. I love his catch phrase, "O, Bother!" and his sense that no matter what happened, it would go wrong and he could count on it. So Eeyore lives his life with his head down because that is what he expects out of life. A parallel character is Glum from Gulliver's Travels. Whenever there is a challenge the lilliputians face, Glum can be heard saying, "We'll never make it! We're doomed!" You can find Eeyores and Glums everywhere you go, even in church.

Where does grumbling come from? Many times grumbling arises out of a sense of scarcity - not enough. We often live with a sense of scarcity. We hoard and stockpile. Case in point: In December 1973, **Johnny Carson** was doing his Tonight Show monologue. He made a joke about the US facing an acute shortage of an important staple. "You know what's disappearing from the supermarket shelves? Toilet paper. There's an acute shortage of toilet paper in the US." The next morning, many of the 20 million TV viewers took this statement literally and ran to the store and bought all the TP they could find. By noon, most of the stores were out of stock! People panicked & hoarded. Carson later had to apologize for scaring the public.

When we experience scarcity - it doesn't necessarily bring out our best selves. Usually, it comes out in our actions or in the form of grumbling or criticizing. The Israelites made it through the Red Sea, but now they are in the midst of wilderness wandering, and not feeling very grateful. They are hungry, tired, with no secure place to give them a sense of home or comfort. Nothing is familiar.

Nearly two months had passed since the Israelites had left Egypt, they had run out of food, and they had no idea where the next meal was coming from. The Israelites complained bitterly,

*How long do you think it'll be, Moses, before we get to this terrific place you keep talking about? You may not have noticed, but all we can see now is wilderness.*

I'm not really sure, says Moses. That wasn't part of God's message.

***If only we had died by the hand of God in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the kettles full of meat and ate our fill of bread; you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill us with hunger. We were better off in Egypt. We were oppressed, but we weren't hungry. We could eat whatever we wanted whenever we wanted it. You said...you said we were going to the Promised Land, the land flowing with milk and honey, but here we are in the wilderness. Where's the food, Moses? We're going to starve, following you, following God. You brought us out here to die. Take us back!***

There are problems with grumbling. **Grumbling fosters a mind-set that assumes the absolute worst**, that when something happens, the mind immediately goes to the **negative consequences** and focuses on negative outcomes. Grumbling promotes a spirit/attitude that focuses on unbelief instead of belief, to see the negative instead of the possibilities for good that exist in the present.

The habit of grumbling falsifies the past. Remember where they were - in slavery, under oppression. They don't remember the whole truth. **Things used to be better, in the good old days of Egypt. How quickly the old days—even the bad old days—become the good old days in our memory.** We forget the bad stuff and remember the good. Sometimes we are **tempted to live in the past and think that those good old days** were better than anything that is going on now or anything that might come in the future. There's nothing wrong with that unless we just keep looking backward and refuse to imagine that anything good could happen in the future.

Grumbling also teaches us to distrust God. Grumbling denies the goodness of God **and the faith that God means good for us**, that even in difficult circumstances, God is compassionately reaching out that we might know that we are loved, called out of bondage into freedom. Grumbling sometimes leads us to scapegoating, to blaming, to looking for someone on whom we can vent our distrust and our uncertainty. "We must choose new leaders and go back to Egypt."

God cared for the Israelites in the wilderness, giving them just enough manna and quail for each day. It wasn't necessarily because they were such obedient people either. They were, for the most part, ungrateful and complaining. But God loved them, and in bringing them through the wilderness, God was teaching them to trust God's love for them, a love that provides. They are told to collect only what they need, the small rations for that one day, and double for the Sabbath.

Remember watching the Sound of Music. Captain von Trapp fears for the future of his beloved Austria. He doesn't sing about Austrian might or intellectual genius or artistic accomplishments. Instead, he sings about a little flower: *Eidelweiss, every morning you greet me. Small and white, clean and bright, you look happy to meet me. Blossom of snow, may you bloom and grow, bloom and grow forever.* What if we put ourselves in the Edelweiss and heard these words from God. God loves what is fragile, what is small. God provides for that which is fragile and small.

Another illustration comes from post-war II England. Some of the children rescued and placed in an orphanage were so distressed with the fear of hunger that they could not sleep. This was after they had gotten enough to eat for months. The caregivers decided to give the children a small loaf of bread to sleep with each night when they tucked them into bed; not because they went to bed hungry, but to assure them that they would eat the next day.

If we place our trust in the God who provides for us, is it possible that we can experience movement from grumbling to gratitude. Paul writes in Philippians 2: "*Do not fill your life with grumbling against God.*" and later in 1 Thessalonians 5: "Give thanks." What does gratitude do? Gratitude teaches us to acknowledge the authority, the goodness and the love of God. Gratitude expresses the hope we have for the future remembering God's faithfulness in the past. Gratitude remembers correctly. It doesn't falsify or romanticize the past. It remembers the mighty acts of God to bring us into the fullness of life.

God patiently but firmly says to us over and over and over again, "*You can learn to thrive and survive on your daily bread from heaven one day at a time.*" May we worship God with hearts full of gratitude and thankfulness, as we discover God's faithfulness in our lives.