

IN BETWEEN | ‘No Man’s Land’

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Introduction

The times that we desperately want to avoid are often the times that God does what we most desperately need. It’s often in the whirlwind of crisis and uncertainty that God brings our greatest opportunity for spiritual growth.

This is exactly what we’re going to be talking about for the next two weeks, because the world has been catapulted into a state of confusion. We’re living in the middle of a global health crisis, and a global economic crisis. It’s thrown our teachers and educators into uncharted territory; any person in any position of leadership anywhere is feeling the weight of making decisions that affect their people, while having absolutely zero consensus on just about anything that’s happening right now.

2020 has been a disorienting whirlwind of a year.

We’re not where we used to be, and we’re not where we’re going to be...

We’re in No Man’s Land. We’re in the In Between.

What’s happening in society at large has thrown many of us into our own individual crises...

- you might be in between jobs...
 - trying to figure out how to pay the bills, provide for your family
- trying to navigate educating your children
- be in between living situations
- maybe it’s the loss of someone you love... and you’re trying to figure out how you’re going to take your next breath, let alone your next step.

Wherever you are, the point is this — crisis and uncertainty have a way of breaking in on our lives when we least expect it.

So, how do we navigate it? How do we handle life when we’re “in between?”

Today

We are going to look at an Old Testament story where an entire nation found themselves between where they used to be, and where they were going to be — the story of the nation of Israel journeying through the Sinai desert. They had little clarity, they constantly questioned the information being handed to them, there was bickering, infighting, dissention — and a whole lot of drama.

BACKGROUND: The people of Israel were between Egypt, and the Promised Land. They were in between a land of slavery and suffering — and a land of abundance, provision, peace, and prosperity.

Israel had been enslaved in Egypt for 400 years. Their cultural heritage nearly had been purged out of them. God was so kind, so gentle with them — as they moved through the desert, toward their new home in Canaan. God provided for and took care of them.

In Numbers 11:4-6, 10-17 we’ll see...

**THE CRAVING FOR COMFORT
THE CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP
THE COMMUNITY WE NEED**

THE CRAVING FOR COMFORT

It's easy to read the scriptures and impose our views ON the story. But it's much more effective to read the scriptures and place ourselves in the story. Imagine eating Manna (a bland, oily, flaky, wafer type thing) for roughly two straight years — 2,190 meals... eating the same thing over and over and over again. The Israelites do exactly what we would.

Numbers 11:4-6

Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, "Oh that we had meat to eat! **5** We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. **6** But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at."

- This is a recurring problem for them — they had this same complaint in the beginning of their journey in Exodus 16. They wanted to go back to the comforts of slavery!
- They are romanticizing slavery! They are in denial.
- *They wanted to go back to the way things used to be — comfortable, familiar — predictable.*

Application — *We're in the wilderness right now — wandering in a desert of uncertainty — not knowing when, how, or even if we're going to come out on the other side — or what the other side is going to look like.* And just like the Israelites — we have found ourselves tired of the unknown — complaining about the uncertainty and instability.

God brought the people out of slavery — but hadn't yet brought slavery out of the Israelites.

**How is God purging you of what you are enslaved to right now?
Because, believe it or not —
God brought you into the wilderness for this very purpose.**

THE CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP

Now we get to Moses.

Numbers 11:10-15

Moses heard the people weeping throughout their clans, everyone at the door of his tent. And the anger of the Lord blazed hotly, and Moses was displeased. **11** Moses said to the Lord, "Why have you dealt ill with your servant? And why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? **12** Did I conceive all this people? Did I give them birth, that you should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a nursing child,' to the land that you swore to give their fathers? **13** Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me and say, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.' **14** I am not able to carry all this people alone; **the burden is too heavy for me.** **15** If you will treat me like this, kill me at once, if I find favor in your sight, that I may not see my wretchedness."

- Moses is having a meltdown, because he's feeling the crushing pressure of leadership! The weight of all these people complaining, and blaming, and venting, and demanding their own way, so ungrateful for all that God had done, absolutely visionless for their future — they're wallowing in self-pity, overflowing with complaint and contempt.
- And Moses says to God, "That's it! I've had it with these people! You brought us out here, and if you expect me to bear this weight, you can just have them back. I quit!"
- And God says, "*Finally! Now I can work!*"

Application — *This season has put an enormous amount of pressure on anyone in leadership — whether that means leadership in your home, family, community, workplace, department, team, or ministry. Everyone is looking to leadership for answers. But we're in a time where there is almost no consensus about any one single issue.*

What Moses does when he's feeling the weight, the demand for answers, for provision, for guidance, for leadership, he says, "God, I can't do this! I can't carry this burden! It's too much for me! Just kill me already!" He comes to the end of himself.

And this is exactly what God does when we're "in between." It brings us to the end of ourselves. Our ability. Our wisdom. Our resources. Our strength won't cut it.

Many of us are just fine bringing God our very best — but we don't really believe God when He says He wants our very worst. Our Father wants all of us.

God wants us to come to him and pour everything out — not just the good — He wants the ugly too...

One of the most common phrases in the Psalms is two words... "How long..."

- How long do I have to carry this burden?
- How long do we have to be uncertain about our future?
- How long do we have to be isolated from people we love?
- How long until you provide for my family, and bring me into my next job?
- How long will I have to live paycheck to paycheck?
- How long until you bring me a spouse?
- How long until I can have children?
- How long do I have to carry the crushing weight of grief and loss?
- When will I come to the other side of this? When will you show up?
- How long do I have to live in the "in between"?

God tells us to cast our cares on him! He doesn't say, "now make sure your cares are valid before you talk to me about them." He just says, "Whatever they are, bring them! If you're going to collapse, collapse on me!"

Because ultimately what you discover at the end of yourself is the goodness of God.

THE COMMUNITY WE NEED

*Moses reaches the end of himself, he brings his crisis to God, and lays it all on the line. What we **don't** see is God's wrath, impatience, or anger. What we **do** see is God's patient, wise, gentle, counsel to an overwhelmed, over-burdened, stressed-out Moses.*

Numbers 11:16-17

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Gather for me **seventy men** of the elders of Israel, whom **you know** to be the elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. **17** And I will come down and talk with you there. And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone."

- There is something mysterious happening here with the Spirit that was on Moses
- There's something incredibly practical as well
- God doesn't allow Moses to die, doesn't remove the mantle of leadership from his shoulders
- God's provides a solution for Moses that allows him to endure for the long haul

There's no end to their situation in sight, everything is uncertain, tensions are high, they're all complaining.

This passage maps out what we need when our future is uncertain.

Courageous Vulnerability

God tells Moses...

Numbers 11:16

“Gather for me **seventy men** of the elders of Israel, whom **you know...**”

I would imagine that in order for Moses to do that, he has to explain to these men what's going on... that he's ready to quit and die — that he doesn't know what to do! If you're in leadership, to admit that vulnerability is absolutely terrifying!

*It's terrifying for anyone to admit, “I don't know. Or I don't know what to do. Or I don't have all the answers.” But do you realize what it does when you ask for help, or admit that you aren't sure what to do? **It empowers the people around you to kick into gear and help!***

If I act like I have all the answers all the time, I actually disempower others, and indirectly teach them that it's not okay to be vulnerable and real, it's not okay to admit weakness, and it's not okay to ask for help! No one expects you to have all the answers, or do everything perfectly, or never show signs of weakness, or act like you've got it all together.

**Moses got real with God and people he trusted.
And that's exactly what we need when we're in the “in between.”**

Application — *When was the last time you really let your spouse in on what you're struggling with right now? When's the last time you let someone you really trust peek behind the curtain of your life and asked for help? When was the last time you allowed someone to see your weakness? Your anxiety? Your stress? What we need when we're “in between” is a community to be vulnerable with.*

Collective Responsibility

When Moses displays a Courageous Vulnerability — God responds with a Collective Responsibility.

Number 11:17

And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone.

- **One of the primary ways God helps us is through other people.**
- God places the Spirit that's on Moses and spreads it across 70 others.
- There is now a community of support provided for Moses and for the people of Israel

Can you imagine how much lighter he felt after that? I'm not in this alone anymore.

Can you imagine what that might do for you right now?

In whatever difficulty you're facing— to have others bear that burden with you?

When the burden is too much, when the certainty is overwhelming, we need each other.

God tells us in the very beginning of scripture, that it's not good for man to be alone.

One of the primary ways God reveals himself to us, is through one another.

Conclusion

We need a courageous vulnerability with people around us — but this starts with vulnerability with God.

We need each other in this season of uncertainty — of instability. We need people to be vulnerable with, people who will carry our burdens.

Jesus Christ himself wasn't even spared the wilderness. After Jesus' baptism, the Father declares His pleasure over His son, then the Holy Spirit leads Jesus to be tested in the wilderness for 40 days. What we need to remember, that no matter what uncertainty, instability, suffering, or hardship we face — we're never alone, because Jesus Himself went first. He knows. And He's right here with us in the middle of our *wilderness wandering*.

**Because of this — there's nothing you can't bring to Him.
Bring it all! Your best, your worst,
and everything "in between"!**

Discussion Questions

1. Where are you feeling "in between" in your life?
2. Like the Israelites, do you find yourself romanticizing "how things used to be"?
3. How is God purging you of what you are enslaved to right now?
4. What burdens or cares are you still carrying, that you have not given to God? Why?
5. Is there any specific area of your life where you need to be vulnerable, to allow someone else to come alongside you, to help you carry that weight?

NOTES