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NUMBERS 10:10-11:3

Numbers Series

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I thank you for the every moment of every day and how we can thank you and enjoy you. Some of those moments, Lord, are happy moments where we can worship you. Some of those are sad moments where we need your comfort. Some of those are difficult moments. We just need to seek you. Or sometimes the moments are confusing and we need to come to you for guidance. In all of those moments we can thank you for those moments and what you're doing in them. Lord, in this moment as we come and open your word I ask that you'd speak to us as you so readily do. You teach us from your word what it means to follow you and to trust you more. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

My wife and I moved to New Jersey twenty-eight years ago. When we moved to New Jersey we moved from Hawaii, so we were really interested in the culture. We had never been on the east coast before. The east coast isn't just Robbinsville. The east coast for us was close to New York City and close to Philadelphia, even close somewhat to Washington D.C. which we hadn't been to before. So we were interested in that.

We decided on the very first year we were here that we'd go to the Macy's Day Parade. We'd seen it on TV, but we thought what an opportunity to go there. We had a seven year old, a four year old, and a one year old at that time. We packed them all up on Thanksgiving morning and we went out to the Macy's Day Parade. It had snowed the day before so there was snow all over the place, lousy weather. But as we stood there and watched the parade go by we saw the band coming by from this high school going by, and then we saw this float coming by and everybody's clapping for that, and we see the big balloon, you know those big float things go by. Every time something went by it was just a sense of anticipation of what's next, what's going on. It's that parade that was pretty exciting.

I thought about that this week because as I look at our passage in Numbers 10, what a very important place. They're getting up and going now. It's like a parade for them. They've already done all of the work. Do you remember up till chapter 10 we've talked about the numbering of all the people, the counting of all the people. We've talked about the dedication of all of the articles that have to do with the tabernacle, just dedicating them to the Lord. Dedicating the Levites themselves and then celebrating the Passover. So as the Passover's being celebrated there's a sense of identity of who we are, where we're going, and now we come to Numbers 10:11.

Let me read that to you. It says this: *On the twentieth day of the second month of the second year, the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle of the covenant law. Then the Israelites set out from*

the Desert of Sinai and traveled from place to place until the cloud came to rest in the Desert of Paran.

What we have here is the parade starting. You remember the Kohathites were the ones who carried the ark of the covenant on poles. So the whole group of people were setting out and it says in the passage I just read that they *came to rest in the Desert of Paran*.

When I think about this wilderness wanderings I think about this sense of we don't know where we're going, but we know who we're following. We don't know exactly where it is that we're going to be tomorrow. We don't know where we're going to camp next week, but we do know where we are, where we've come from, and we do know that we're going somewhere.

I would suggest that that is not only true of the Israelites at the time; it's also true of you and me. We don't know exactly what's going to happen this week. We don't know where we're going. We don't know what's going to happen. But we do know who we're following.

That's what the Israelites needed to learn. They're going to learn more of it in this chapter as we go through and the first few verses of chapter 11. They're going to learn a lot about what God is doing and the importance of following the Lord. That becomes the most important thing that they do.

Now it says there that they go, they're wandering, and they end up in the Desert of Paran. So this red line here marks about the wandering path that they are taking. They end up at Mount Sinai and Mount Horeb where they're spending their time at the bottom there. You see that? Mount Sinai and Mount Horeb, that's where they get the law. Once they get the law, now the cloud's lifted and it's taking them and they're wandering around to the wilderness of Paran, somewhere up in this Arabian peninsula.

It is not the most beautiful place. We have there a lot of desert, we have a lot of wilderness. So you can imagine the walking around there, what that's going to look like, how people are going to respond to that. It's a challenging place. It's wilderness. Not a lot of trees there. Not a lot of oasis, not a lot of water. It's just a lot of a place for wilderness, shrubs, scrub, desert, sand. All of those things are taking place in this wilderness area.

The parade has started. They're taking off. Now I'm going to read you the names of the people and all of the parade that's going forward. Just as in the Macy's Day Parade, if you were to watch it on TV, the announcer's announcing this group and announcing that group as they're going by. That's what's happening here in the passage starting in Numbers 10:13.

They set out, this first time, at the Lord's command through Moses. The divisions of the camp of Judah went first, under their standard. Nahshon son of Amminadab was in command. Nethanel son of Zuar was over the division of the tribe of Issachar, and Eliab son of Helon was over the division of the tribe of Zebulun. Then the tabernacle was taken down, and the Gershonites and Merarites, who carried it, set out.

The divisions of the camp of Reuben went next, under their standard. Elizur son of Shedeur was in command. Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai was over the division of the tribe of Simeon, and Eliasaph son of Deuel was over the division of the tribe of Gad. Then the Kohathites set out, carrying the holy things. The tabernacle was to be set up before they arrived.

The divisions of the camp of Ephraim went next, under their standard. Elishama son of Ammihud was in command. Gamaliel son of Pedahzur was over the division of the tribe of Manasseh, and Abidan son of Gideoni was over the division of the tribe of Benjamin.

Finally, as the rear guard for all the units, the divisions of the camp of Dan set out under their standard. Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai was in command. Pagiel son of Okran was over the division of the tribe of Asher, and Ahira son of Enan was over the division of the tribe of Naphtali. This was the order of march for the Israelite divisions as they set out.

So just like a parade, they're proceeding through, they're moving forward and the parade is taking off.

Now verse 29. *Now Moses said to Hobab...* Do you see that Hobab there? I bet you always wanted to know what Moses said to Hobab. You're about to learn. It's very important what he says because you're going to get a picture here of Moses' approach to this whole thing, about the leadership that's going on. Moses has a different way of thinking about the trials and struggles than do the Israelites as they're going through. Listen to what he says. You pick it up in his conversation with his father-in-law.

Now Moses said to Hobab son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are setting out for the place about which the Lord said, 'I will give it to you.' Come with us and we will treat you well, for the Lord has promised good things to Israel." Do you see what he's saying? We are following the Lord. We're trusting the Lord. That's what he's saying here.

He answered, "No, I will not go; I am going back to my own land and my own people."

But Moses said, "Please do not leave us. You know where we should camp in the wilderness, and you can be our eyes. If you come with us, we will share with you whatever good things the Lord gives us."

This reminds me of the way we talk sometimes to people who are not believers and we're trying to share Christ with them. "Come on with me! I know where I'm going in some respects, but I'm following the Lord and good things are going to happen. I'd love to share those things with you. God has great things planned. Would you join me in this? Come on with me and be a part of this." That's Moses' message. I just like Moses' positive and hopeful attitude that he has in the midst of the struggle. He's saying, "Come on with me. I'd love to have you there with me. Would you come with us?"

See, Moses has learned a secret about happiness. It's a secret that all of us need to catch. He's learned that the secret to happiness is knowing God and trusting Him, following Him. That's

what the secret to happiness is and we're going to see that all through the passage here. Knowing the Lord and trusting Him. So he's extending the invitation to Hobab to be a part of that.

Verse 33: *So they set out from the mountain of the Lord and traveled for three days.*

You're going to see that the three days seems to be the threshold that the Israelites can handle before they start complaining. We all have those thresholds, don't we? Bad things start happening, we have a certain amount of time before we start thinking negatively and we start complaining. Sometimes just in our own hearts we start complaining, but sometimes it comes out in our lives.

It says, *The ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them during those three days to find them a place to rest. The cloud of the Lord was over them by day when they set out from the camp.*

I like it that it says the *ark of the Lord went ahead of them to find a place to rest*. It reminds me of what Jesus says. *"I'm going to prepare a place for you,"* He says. God is looking for that place for us to rest. He's picking out those places in our pilgrimage of where we're going wrong.

They're not done. They're not at the Promised Land. They're going three days. They're trying to find a place to rest and God already has that place picked out. I think God has those places picked out in our lives, those places where we're moving along and He says, "Here's a place for you to rest," and He brings us alongside of a friend or He brings us into a worship service or He brings us alongside a radio message or some sense where "Yes. My heart has found some rest at this point."

Moses had a tradition, it says here in the next verses, of things he would say whenever they took off and went and whenever they came back. *Whenever the ark set out, Moses said, "Rise up, Lord! May your enemies be scattered; may your foes flee before you." Whenever it came to rest, he said, "Return, Lord, to the countless thousands of Israel."*

Whenever the cloud went out Moses would say, "Okay, God! May your enemies be scattered. Let's go! Here we go." And when the cloud lowered again, he says, "Lord, may you come back to the countless thousands of Israel here." That was the words that Moses said.

He just had this real positive attitude about his relationship with the Lord and what God was doing. He had hardships in his life, but he had an approach to the hardships that was different than the Israelite people that we're going to read about in the next three verses.

Now we have thirty-eight years from the time they leave Mount Sinai. They've been there for two years, so you've got forty years all together. But thirty-eight years of wandering. We're going to get snapshots of their experience and we're going to learn from the snapshots. We don't get every story. But we get some of them and we can benefit from them and learn from them.

Numbers 11:1-3 share with us part of that. Notice it says in verse 1 – *Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord, and when he heard them his anger was*

aroused. Then fire from the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. When the people cried out to Moses, he prayed to the Lord and the fire died down. So that place was called Taberah, because fire from the Lord had burned among them.

We learned the Taberah lesson today. A lesson that I'm sure the Israelites referred to – “Remember Taberah? Remember what we learned back there?” The word I want to point out in verse 1 is a Hebrew word, *rah*. It means hardships. It's translated hardships there in the New International Version. But up here you can see that this Hebrew word is translated in the Old Testament -- seven times it's translated *adversity*, four times *calamity*, *disaster*, *evil* ninety-four times, which gives a moral implication.

You have these adversities, you have these calamities in your life just like I do. We all have a bucket and when the adversity bucket gets filled up too much it starts to affect our happiness meter. Right? And so you can call him whatever you want. You can call him hurt, you can call him ruin, you can call him trouble, wickedness. But evil is mentioned ninety-eight times. Often we'll put moral implications to that and say, “That is really bad what that person did to me. That is really wrong what they did to me,” and the bucket starts to fill up with these things.

Hardship is the word. You can call it hardship, challenges, you can call it evil. It's *rah* is what it's called. That's the Hebrew word. Bad things are happening in these people's lives and the hardships are there.

I think we have this happiness meter that's often connected to these buckets that we put around. We have buckets and we determine how we're going to be happy. Sometimes it's the bucket of hardships and when that bucket starts filling up then we have a problem. So for me one bad thing I can handle it, but you start piling four or five at the same time then it starts to be a problem for me. If my happiness is tied into that bucket, I'm in trouble.

Another bucket I'm tempted to find my happiness in is the productivity bucket. When I'm productive I feel happy. If I'm not productive, I don't feel happy. So I have this meter in my life about my activity level. So when my activity level is set here for me then I feel okay. But then sometimes my activity starts to increase, I go, “Oh man I am overcommitted,” and then I'm starting to feel uncomfortable and unhappy about that. So I'll start cutting back on some things.

My life starts to come back into some level of happiness (can I say?), but then it starts going down a little ways and I start feeling like, “I've got some more time. I can put some more stuff into my life,” and so I add another activity in there to move my level back up because I want to feel productive because I'm tempted to base my happiness on productivity. So I keep adding things in until I'm back to that level for me and then I feel good about my life because there's a certain amount of busyness there.

Where's our happiness attached to? I think we're going to see some important things in this passage because the people are complaining. That's what's happening in this passage. They're going to complain about the things that are going on.

What happens then when our hardships come on our lives, we start complaining on the inside first. That's why I like this Psalm 19:14 which says, *May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.* Lord, it's the meditations of my heart that get in the wrong place first. I can start complaining in my heart about things that are going on before I start complaining outside of my mouth. Jesus said *it is out of the heart that the mouth speaks.* So I want the meditations of my heart to be in the right place.

Now here's what's happening with the negative thinking that's going on with these people. They've got problems. They're real problems. They've got wilderness around. There's no trees. They don't have the things they want around them. So they engage in this negative thinking and it starts moving them toward complaining. God has a solution.

I want to talk about the solution because I think this is the difference between Christians and nonbelievers. The world has a solution for negative thinking and the solution is this: positive thinking. Just think positively. There's a whole positive thinking movement. Just think positively about your problems and then you'll feel better. "Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens, fine copper kettles and warm woolen mittens. So when the dog bites or the bee stings, when I'm feeling sad, I just remember my favorite things and then I don't feel so bad." Okay? Now there is a worldly philosophy that says if you're thinking about bad things, start thinking about all the good things you have and you can feel better about life.

I want to say first of all that God also says that in Philippians 4 *whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is honorable -- think on those things.* So thinking about the right kind of things is also very important to God. But it's a technique where the strategy is something deeper in the heart.

A humanistic view says if you're feeling bad or you're thinking negatively then what you need to do is think positively. That's not God's solution. God says, "If you're thinking badly or bad things are going on then you need to trust me and get to know me. If you get to know me and trust me then you're going to be able to experience me in the midst of the problems."

It's not about changing our thinking from negative thinking to positive thinking; it's about knowing how God is working in the negative things in my life and we recognize that God is there teaching me sometimes. Not always is He teaching me. Sometimes He's working out character in my life. Sometimes the hardship is just there not for my benefit but for others. So that as people are seeing me suffering I can shine as a light. God is at work in the negative stuff. It's not like we need to move from the negative stuff to the positive stuff. We need to learn how to thinking rightly about the negative stuff. God has a solution and that solution is knowing Him and trusting in His plan when we start thinking negatively.

Now the Israelites, we're going to find, have a life-debilitating, chronic problem of negativity. Maybe you know somebody like that. They're always complaining, they're always thinking about the negative, they're talking about the bad things are going on. So it's always coming out of their mouth. I want you to understand how that happens and why it happens in our passage today. We're going to see some very important things.

In order to do that I'm going to take us back – this is as far as we're going today, chapter 11:1-13. Next time we get together I'm going to do complaining lesson number two. This is complaining lesson number one. Alright? So we're going to go back into Israel's history because it's just fascinating to me to see what God does.

You've got to understand, first of all, that people complain because of real things. Right? Real things. These people are in the desert. Those pictures that I've shown are not happy pictures. There's real problems that people experienced in their lives. Moses has learned the solution for dealing with the challenges, but it took him some time too.

When Moses was first approached by the Lord in the burning bush, "I want you to lead my people out of Egypt," Moses had some negative thinking at the time. I don't know if you remember that, but he said, "God, my voice is not that great. I'm not a good speaker. What am I going to say if they ask me who you are, what God are you? Because they've got lots of gods and they're asking who you are?" And God answers every one of his five objections that he gives in that passage and Moses then is "okay, I'm going to go." So he goes.

Ten different times he goes to Pharaoh and Pharaoh says, "No," and all these plagues happen and Moses is learning the best thing is to trust the Lord. To know God and to trust the Lord. I'm learning more about who God is, Moses is saying. I'm trusting Him.

So Moses' perspective on the hardships that are being experienced here is different than the Israelites' as they're going forward here. They complained. Now the word *complain* in Numbers 11, you see it there now. *The people complained*. The word *complain* is the idea of mourning because of disappointment. That's where it roots. They're just complaining because they're disappointed about life.

I think that that's a problem that many of us have in life. We complain about things because we're disappointed. And sometimes the things are real things. We have a real physical problems we're trying to address. Real financial problems. Real problems in a relationship and problems with the job. Whatever it is, we've got real problems as we tend to complain.

But sometimes they're just perceived problems. The four year old who just can't take it because he wants macaroni and cheese instead of spaghetti. He feels disappointed, so he whines and complains about it. The nine year old who wants the upgrade to this video game, the mom says, "No, we're not going to do that," can be complaining and complaining, "How come everybody else gets this? I never get this?" and makes the parents feel guilty. Right?

That's because children sometimes think their job description in life is to have fun. And your job as a parent is to facilitate that. That's not our job as parents who help our kids have fun. Our job as parents is to help our children grow and develop. So hardships are part of that and our children need to grow and learn.

It may be that all you did was tell your fifteen year old daughter she can't go to the party on Friday night and, boy, she's disappointed. She whines and complains about it.

So sometimes the problems are real problems. Sometimes they are perceived problems in our lives. It still goes through the heart whether they're real or perceived. We've got to have a way to deal with those in our lives.

Now look at Numbers 11:1. *Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord, and when he heard them his anger was aroused.*

Now you might look at that and say, "Wow, God sure is impulsive here. He's just kind of reacting impulsively like we do. If you heard somebody whining all the time, you'd want to let them have it too. So God is going to discipline them in this passage.

But I want to take you back because this is not the way God has acted the first four times they've complained. I want you to see the first four times they complained and how God treated them because this is time number five. This is not the first four times. So I want to take you back and I want you to understand a little more about complaining because I think it will help you as you're dealing with other people or as you deal with yourself.

Remember let's go back in their history for a moment. The Israelites came out of Egypt and they went into Egypt as friends, as guests. But it wasn't long before the new Pharaoh comes along, new Pharaohs came along and as they did then the Egyptians didn't remember the Israelites and saw them as a threat.

They decided they're going to build two cities, Pithom and Rameses, and when they were going to build them they needed a brick-making factory. They chose the Israelites to be the brick-making factory, so they became the servants, the slaves. They were beaten, they were whipped by the task masters in Egypt.

And then to make their work even harder the Egyptian says, "Okay you guys. We're not going to provide the natural ingredients to make the bricks. You're going to have to go find the straw yourself." Now you have to do not only the same number of bricks, but you've got to find the straw in order to do that. These people were mistreated. The hardship they experienced was real. It was painful.

Maybe one of the most difficult things was then Pharaoh decided he was going to kill all the babies two years old and younger. Moses, of course, was spared out of that. But can you imagine how many of those Israelite families lost their children, how much they must have hated the Egyptians, how real their suffering is? When someone has suffered real suffering they're more susceptible to negative thinking and whining and complaining.

These people experienced real suffering and so when they came out of Egypt and God rescued them out of there, they could hardly wait to get out of there, but it didn't take long for them to start complaining the first time. So we want to see how God treats them because God knows that their complaining attitude is not going to help them in the Promised Land that He wants to take them to. This is a heart problem. This isn't just because it makes everybody feel uncomfortable. They've got a heart problem that's going to prevent them from experiencing the blessing of God.

People who are negative and they complain miss out on the blessing of God and God knows that. He wants to train them to get out of that problem that they're experiencing of always perceiving the suffering and talking about it and having the temptation to complain.

I'm going to take you back into four chapters, Exodus 14, 15, 16, and 17. You can follow along. Just listen to me talk. I'm going to talk you through them. I'm not going to show you them. But I want you to understand that by the time God gets to this point in Number 10 we can see that He's *slow to anger, abounding in love*.

In Exodus 14 the Israelites had just escaped from Egypt. They're running away. They can hardly wait to get away. Really they're on a trip, but they're not going to somewhere. They're running away from something. As they're running away from the Egyptians they come to the Red Sea and the Red Sea stops them like a wall. They see that wall there, they turn around and see Pharaoh and all of the armies coming, and they experience some negativity in their minds.

I want you to know that negative thinking inside of our hearts – hardships can lead to negative thinking, the negative thinking can lead to complaining, and the complaining can lead to some emotional challenges. Fear, anxiety, depression can end up.

You're going to see the fear right here in Exodus 14. Let me read the verses to you starting in verse 10.

As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses (listen to the complaining now), "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"

Listen to Moses' response. *Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still."*

Well that's a good message for me. Sometimes I just need to be still instead of trying to figure out the problem and trying to solve the problem or complain to God about what's going on.

But the next verse I even love more. Verse 15 says, *Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on."*

Wow. Sometimes maybe I need to move on and quit focusing on those negative things from the past. Maybe I need to move on in my life. There's a fundamental problem in the heart of a person who complains. It's that they're focusing on their hardships and they're focusing on their negativity. Yes, they may be hurt. Yes, they may be damaged in some way. But God wants to do something amazing. He wants them to learn how to get to know Him and to trust Him.

So He said, “Just watch. Just watch what I’m going to do, how I’m going to get you out of this totally impossible situation. Just watch. You’re going to get to know me a little bit better.” Of course we know the story about how God opened up the Red Sea, they went through, and all the Egyptians died in that Red Sea.

Just as the body needs nutrients in order to be healthy, the heart needs practices that are going to keep it healthy on the inside. When you see the symptom of negativity or complaining in your own life, it’s a reminder I need to go back and, not just think positively, I need to go back and I need to get to know God better. I need to trust Him better in my life.

I think that’s why this verse in Proverbs 3:5-6 is so strategic that we love. We love this verse. But this is why it’s so important. *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.* We all need that. When we start to complain it’s an indication of some heart work that needs to be done and we need to trust the Lord. We need to know what that means.

Well if we continue on in the story of Exodus past chapter 14 and we go to 15 it says, *Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water.* It seems that their tolerance level is three days for problems and when they have three days of it then they’re fed up, they’re overwhelmed, they can’t handle it anymore. I don’t know what your tolerance level is, but when you get there you need to be reminded that we need to trust the Lord in those situations.

When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.) So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, “What are we to drink?”

Now it’s really interesting to see how God responds in this situation too. Because there’s not fire in the camp. There’s no firmness here. It just says God heard their complaining and He gave them what they wanted. That’s what it says. He gave them the water. He made the water sweet and He uses it to give them an illustration of how they are to live.

He says, “If you listen carefully to the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you.”

I am the Lord. Get to know God. *I am the Lord who heals you,* Jehovah-rapha. I am El Shaddai, God who is powerful. I am Jehovah-jireh, the God who provides. “You need to learn to know me and trust me” is what He’s saying to the Israelites as they’re wandering around.

The very next chapter in Exodus they start complaining about food. They want food. So they’re complaining about it. What does God do? He doesn’t judge them. He doesn’t discipline them. He gives them food. He gives them manna and He gives them quail.

The next chapter, chapter 17, they complained about water. “We want water.” At this point Moses is fed up with the complaining. He goes to God and he says, “What am I supposed to do with these people?” So even Moses as the leader is getting tired of the complaining. No

discipline in the passage, just water. He's trying to illustrate to them "I want you to know who I am."

This is why it's so important. Here the Israelites have a chronic, life-debilitating problem of negativity. And because of that it's going to hinder their ability to enjoy the future.

I'm going to take you to the future for just a moment because I want you to remember about the story of how they come to the Jordan River and they're going to send twelve spies out there. Two are going to come back and say, ""Yes. We can do it." That's what Caleb says with his buddy Joshua. "Yes, we can do it." Ten of them said, "No." Now all the Israelites are sitting around there listening and what do they do? They focus on the negative. "We can't do this." They miss out on the blessing. They miss out on the Promised Land. Their life-debilitating problem of negativity is going to get them into so much trouble that they can't go in and enjoy the blessing.

See, God knows that if they're going to get into the land flowing with milk and honey they need to have something going on in their hearts that will allow them to do that. Otherwise they're going to get the milk and honey and they're going to say, "We're not happy with milk and honey. We want something else."

We have to learn how to trust God and we need to know God. That's the solution to negative thinking. That's why this is so bad for the Israelites. God is trying a different strategy now. Instead of saying, "Okay, I'm just going to give you what you want," watch me solve your problems, watch me serve, watch me do what needs to be done, I'm going to judge you with this fire on the outskirts of the camp. This firmness that needs to take place.

I would suggest that in our lives as we work with children sometimes there's a time for gentleness and graciousness and putting our arm around them and saying, "It's okay. We can handle this." Sometimes there's a time for firmness and God's going to do both of those things here. In the passage we're in now it's more about the firmness.

Because we tend to want – if you've got a negative thinking, you're always looking for something else to make you happy. Whatever the bucket is you choose. If you've got a happiness bucket it drains and it has holes in it. So you always have to have the latest gadget or the next upgrade or the next trip. Or whatever it has to be it has to be in the bucket because it has holes in it. So we've got to add more to it continually in order to keep our happiness meter going in the right way.

What God is saying is I want you to get rid of the bucket mentality and put your happiness meter attached to the river flowing with living water. When we do that then we're drawing upon the Lord and allowing Him to work in our lives in some really neat ways.

Let me read to you again Numbers 11:1-3. *Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord, and when he heard them his anger was aroused. Then fire from the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. When the people cried out*

to Moses, he prayed to the Lord and the fire died down. So that place was called Taberah, because fire from the Lord had burned among them.

God has a different approach to hardships that we need to get in touch with, we need to understand. Because the Israelites came to the Promised Land, they said, “No, we’re not going to go in. It’s too negative. We don’t want to do that.” God said, “Okay, here’s what I’m going to do. I’m going to teach you some more. You’re going to wander in the wilderness for thirty-eight more years, forty years altogether. And during that time I’m going to do amazing things in your lives. I’m going to teach you who I am and you’re going to be able to follow me.”

But unfortunately what’s going to happen is a lot of the parents, the males twenty years old and older, died. They couldn’t go in. It’s the children who benefited and the children were able to go. So when they come back to the Jordan River the next time, they’re saying, “Yes, take me in. I’m ready to go. Joshua, lead us in. We can follow you.” They’re ready to take advantage of the blessings that God has provided for them. It’s a beautiful thing.

Here’s what I think we need to learn. We need to understand that God has designed hardship for a purpose. So if we look in the New Testament we’re going to see verses like these in Hebrews 12 – *Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children.* And then the verse continues, but down in 11 it says, *However, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.* We want to look at hardships not as a thing to escape from but to use in order to grow and develop. That’s what we want to do in our lives.

Ultimately God has a Promised Land blessing available to us that we can only enjoy if we have a mentality that will allow that, where we’re trusting the Lord and we’re allowing Him to work in our lives. We can’t say, “No, I can’t do it. It’s too hard.”

I was talking to a lady this week who wants to escape from her situation and she says, “I’ve been hurt too much.”

I said, “No you haven’t.”

She says, “Yes I have.”

I said, No, you haven’t.”

She says, “Yes, I have.”

I said, “God says you’re a Christian and He says *no temptation has overtaken you except what is common to man. But God is faithful; he will not allow you be tempted above what you’re able, but with the temptation he will also make a way to escape* (don’t forget the last part of the verse) *so that you can bear up under it.*” She was silent pondering those ideas.

Because that’s really what we need to understand. Sometimes we say to ourselves, “It’s too hard.” It’s not too hard. God allows the hardship in our lives for good reasons and we need to learn how to respond to that. We need to be careful of the whining and complaining that takes place in our lives.

Look at this passage in Philippians 2:14 – *Do everything without grumbling or arguing.* There’s an approach that we can have to life situations that Paul is telling about in Philippians. *I can do*

all things through him who gives me strength. There's a mentality that we have because we know Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior. *I can do all things.* We must get to know God and we must change, we must trust in Him.

Frankly, I want to learn from God's gentle approach. I don't want to wait for the firmness. I want to pick up the lessons earlier in life. I don't want Him to have to come along and discipline me in a hard way. I know that I need to learn the lessons. But God, just teach. I'll listen to your whispers. You don't have to yell. I'll listen to them. I think that's the attitude we want to have in our lives.

I think as we go through we're going to see several places and they're named. Marah named because the water was bitter. Taberah because of the fire of the outskirts of the camp. Their lives were marked, their path, the map of their lives was marked in part by the trials that they experienced, the mistakes that they made, or maybe the victories that God accomplished in their lives. And I think that's true. I think if we look in our own lives we can see back and say, "Wow. I really messed up there." Those become places, the Taberachs in our lives where we say, "Boy, I learned from that. I'm going to live my life differently now. I'm going to do something different."

God is gracious. He loves us and He wants us to grow in our lives and He wants to move us to something very positive. We may not know where we're going, but we know who we're following. We might not know where the map is taking us at any given moment, but we're learning how to know God better and trust Him. If we can know God better and trust Him then it makes more sense in the confusion of our lives and the challenges that we're facing in our lives.

I think this is a very difficult problem for some people. A chronic, life-debilitating problem of negativity. The solution isn't just positive thinking. The solution is to call upon the power of Jesus' name in our lives. That He'll come and change us from the inside out and break the chains of bondage that we're experiencing in our hearts and it will free us. It will free us to see Him in the midst of the struggle and aren't always looking for the next escape out of the pain.

Wow. It's just a powerful message that the Lord shared with my heart this week and I hope it's touching you in some significant ways as well. God wants to break the chains. He wants to move forward in our hearts. It's through the power of Jesus Christ that that's going to take place. It's all the more motivation for any of us to say, "I serve Jesus Christ. I want to love the Lord all the more. I want to follow Jesus in my life. Not just because my parents do, but because I do." Because Christians think differently than non-Christians. They approach problems differently than non-believers do. It's amazing what happens when we trust the Lord in our own lives.

Why don't you stand with me and let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we come before you now and we ask that you would speak to our hearts each one of us. Apply this to our own hardships, our own issues and we want to dedicate ourselves to you. We cry out to you, Lord, that you would free us from the bondage that sometimes takes place because of our own poor responses to life situations. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.