

Issue 11 - Faith in the Wilderness: When We Grumble in the Desert

Messy Story of the Week

It was one of those mornings.

The cereal spilled, the printer jammed, the six-year-old couldn't find her shoes, and Jan heard herself mutter, *"Why does everything have to be so hard?"*

No one answered, but the question hung there in the air.

A few minutes later, she heard the same tone echo back from a child: *"Why do I have to do everything?"*

It stopped her in her tracks.

That familiar exasperation — the sigh, the complaint, the helplessness — it wasn't new. She'd modeled it.

It starts with a sigh.

Sometimes it's over dishes, sometimes over bills, sometimes because you've told the same child (or spouse) the same thing five times. You sigh because you're tired. Then you mutter, *"Why do I always have to be the one to..."*

Faithful God Then and Now

That sigh is the sound of the Israelites in the desert.

They weren't hungry because God had failed to feed them; they were hungry for control, safety, and predictability. Their complaint wasn't about manna — it was about fear. And if we're honest, our complaints usually are, too.

God led His people *into* the wilderness — not to punish them, but to form them. They had lived in slavery for generations; they didn't yet know what freedom with God felt like. The desert was a training ground where they would learn trust, obedience, and dependence.

“Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart.”

— Deuteronomy 8:2

And in many ways, He still leads us through the same kind of wilderness today.

What We Can Learn

1. Grumbling Reveals Fear.

When the Israelites said, *“If only we had died in Egypt!”* they were voicing something deeper than discontent — they were afraid that no one was coming to rescue them. Grumbling is often a smokescreen for anxiety. When we feel powerless, we complain to feel a moment of control.

2. Complaining Is a Form of Powerlessness.

It sounds active (“I’m doing something about it!”), but it actually reinforces helplessness. It’s the mindset that says, *“Things never change.”* It can be “learned helplessness” in psychological terms, but in spiritual terms, it’s **unbelief**. The root is the same: *I don’t trust that God — or anyone — will show up for me.*

3. Fear Hides Under Scarcity.

Scarcity says, “There’s not enough love, time, money, or grace to go around.” But manna falls new every morning. God’s provision isn’t a warehouse — it’s a daily delivery. Scarcity is not a supply problem; it’s a trust problem.

4. Faith Reclaims Agency.

Faith doesn’t deny hardship — it simply refuses to stay stuck there. Faith says, *“I will act on what I know about God, not on what I feel about this moment.”*

The Israelites had seen miracles with their own eyes, yet still doubted. We have something even greater — the full story of redemption, the cross, the resurrection, the

Holy Spirit — and still, we grumble. The question isn't, *"How could they?"* It's, *"How could we?"*

Behind the Curtain

In coaching, I often meet people who say, "I feel stuck." Sometimes they mean their circumstances. More often, it's their thinking that's trapped. Grumbling is just stuck faith — it can't move forward because it doesn't yet believe there *is* a way forward. But once faith stirs, even a little, the heart begins to remember: *God has led me this far. He won't abandon me now.*

Faith Step for the Week

Each evening, list one way God provided for you *today*. Call it your **manna moment** — a place where grace showed up right on time. You're retraining your heart to see that God is present and trustworthy, even when tomorrow feels uncertain.

Bible Verse

"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day.'"

— Exodus 16:4

2-Minute Practice

Take a deep breath in and pray:

"You are my provider."

Breathe out and release:

"I have enough for today."

Repeat three times. Let your body catch up with what your soul already knows.

Next Week

Faith in the Wilderness, Part 2: Remembering the Journey — how reflection anchors faith and builds a legacy of trust for your family.