

*Use this format as a family, a couple, or with a small group.

Message Summary

God is leading his people to the Promised Land after delivering them from slavery in Egypt. But the sad truth is they are not ready to enter it. They don't know how to follow God's leadership. Their first reaction, when hardship comes, is to assume the worst about God's motives. They know God exists—they simply don't trust him. These former slaves, used to resisting orders from cruel masters, have much to learn about living in whole-hearted obedience under good leadership. As a consequence of their stiff-necked opposition to God—instead of bowed-neck submission—God enrolls them in his “(re)formation school”, and they must wander in the wilderness for 40 years until all those who disobeyed God pass away and a new generation that trusts him takes their place. God never promises to take away pain or hardship—for them or us—but his desire is that we learn to rest in either his provision or his promises. We learn this through waiting and remembering. And the deserts of our lives are where we develop that spiritual muscle. By learning to be “at home with God” whatever our outward circumstances, we can enjoy God's blessings—or lack of them (it makes no difference). Mature followers don't confuse the hardships in life, which come and go, with the goodness of God, which is unchanging. When we remember and always will be, it is easier to trust him while we wait.

Opening Question

Did you go on trips when you were young? What do you remember about them?

Discussion Questions

Note: All page numbers below are from *The Story*, 2008 edition. Additional group discussion questions for this chapter can be found on page 392.

1. Israel's complaining is a rejection of God and a longing for the very slavery from which He delivered them (page 58 or Numbers 11:1-23). What parallels can you make to how you have been tempted to reject God in times of pain, and consider going back to your “Egypt”?
2. The Israelites time and again follow the pattern of: Provision, Hardship, Rebellion, Consequences, and Repentance. Can you identify a time in your own life when a similar pattern occurred? What did you learn from that experience?
3. The preferred pattern is to have Hardship followed up with Waiting (in trust). Talk about a time in your life when that happened. What helped you avoid rebelling against God even though it might have seemed easy to do?
4. When Joshua and Caleb gave their report about Canaan, they spoke of both opportunities and dangers. The other ten spies had a more one-sided take—and concluded they were “grasshoppers” (page 61 or Numbers 13:26-33). Why do you think their view of themselves had such a profound impact on how they interpreted what they saw and what they chose to do? How do you see that same dynamic operating in your own life?
5. God makes it clear that he's not establishing his people in the land of Canaan because they deserve it, but rather because the Canaanite sin is so great they are being judged (page 69 or Deuteronomy 8 & 9:1-6). Why do you think Israel might have become proud about their status as “chosen” despite these cautionary words from God? How can we Christians sometimes sound to the non-Christian world like we think we are “better” than those around us?
6. What do you think the Bible means when it talks about “waiting on God” in passages such as Psalm 130:5 “I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope” or Proverbs 20:22, “Do not say, ‘I'll pay you back for this wrong!’ Wait for the LORD, and he will avenge you.”? In what sense were the Israelites waiting on God by the time they finished their wanderings in the desert? Why is learning to wait an important part of our spiritual maturing?
7. Much of the emphasis of Moses' final speech (page 70 or Deuteronomy 29:2-29) is about the free choice God gives to the Israelites to obey him and reap the benefits—or disobey him and reap the consequences. As you look at phrases Moses uses, what are some parallels you can make to opportunities and warnings God offers you?

As a final question, you can ask group members who did the personal reflection assignment if there is anything from that material they would like to share or ask the group about. Close in prayer.