

## **“What Do You Do When You Can Do No More?”**

### **Numbers 11:10-15**

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This is not your typical prayer. I doubt that you would want to teach it to your children for them to repeat before bedtime. It is, however, a prayer that we need to study because of what it can teach us about God, life, ourselves and faith. Let's look at it this morning.

This is a prayer that Moses prayed at the lowest point in his life. He successfully led the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt only to hear them gripe endlessly about the accommodations and food. In addition, he tried to handle every dispute that arose in their camps and it took a toll on him. He was exhausted and frustrated. He had reached his limit and wanted to die.

So what did he do? He prayed but as I said at the beginning, this was not your usual bedtime prayer. It certainly was not like the prayer we looked at last week when we studied the Thanksgiving lament, Psalm 86. That prayer was filled with petitions to and praise for a good and faithful God. This prayer doesn't even mention God's name. It possesses no elements of gratitude or praise. All protocol has been abandoned out of urgency or anger. Moses was desperate and at the end of his rope.

Ever felt this way? Sure, all of us have. Maybe you are at this point in your life this morning. You may even be here out of desperation. You don't know where else to turn.

What can Moses' prayer teach you and me about how to handle life when it is bigger than we are? What do we need to do when we are at the end of our rope? What do you do when you feel you can do no more? Let me give you some advice based upon an experience Moses had.

**The first thing you need to do is let off some steam.** Chances are if you have come to the end of your road, you are angry, frustrated, disappointed, disillusioned and need to talk. Moses did.

“Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the entrance of his tent. The Lord became exceedingly angry and Moses was troubled. He asked the Lord, ‘Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers? Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, ‘Give us meat to eat!’ I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now-if I have found favor in your eyes-and do not let me face my own ruin’ ” Numbers 11:10-15.

Do you think Moses needed to vent? Why was he so upset? What drove him to desperation?

Actually, everybody in this story is angry. The Israelites were restless because they were tired of roaming and eating manna meals. God was upset because they were grumbling like spoiled, ungrateful children. Moses was angry because it seemed to him

that God had dreamed up this wonderful idea of liberating his people only to dump all the problems associated with it in his lap. So what did Moses do? He unloaded his feelings and a truckload of accusatory questions on God.

Have you ever been this bold and prayed like this? Why do you think Moses was able to do so? I think it was because he took his relationship with God seriously. He was willing to be honest with God and lay everything on the line. He felt God was responsible for his plight and owed him some answers, so he asked a list of rapid fire questions.

How did God respond? Total silence. While Moses talked He said nothing. When Moses finished with his tantrum/prayer, then He responded by providing Moses help and the people meat.

Years ago I had a friend that told me to listen to angry people because they will tell you the truth. Moses was angry and candid. God listened.

I like what this tells me about Moses and God and teaches me about faith. Do you recall the quote I used last week from Karl Barth? “If you want to know what someone believes about God, don’t listen to what they say about Him but to Him.”

This prayer tells me that Moses believed that he could express his greatest doubts, bitterest resentments and deepest angers and God would listen. He felt safe doing this in God’s presence, not afraid. Perhaps he had not always felt comfortable being so candid and courageous, but the longer they journeyed together, the more intimate they became.

I don’t know about you, but this is the kind of God I need and relationship for which I long. I need a God that encourages honest dialogue, thought-provoking questions that even hold Him accountable and the expression of my strongest feelings. Life is not always ordered and predictable and I need to know that God cares when I struggle, listens to my complaints and values my opinions.

This is what I have needed out of every significant and serious relationship in my life. I needed it with my parents and siblings. I need it with my mate and children. I need it with my closest friends. Why would I want anything less in a relationship with God?

**Secondly, when life is overwhelming, acknowledge your limitations.** Moses did. “I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me” Numbers 11:14.

Everyone has limits and wise is the person that knows when she has reached the boundary. I suspect God was wondering what took Moses so long to come to grips with his.

A significant part of my counseling is spent helping people discover their limits and giving them permission to live within them. Most of us want to extend ourselves too far and take on more responsibilities than we can handle. We are prone to accept other people’s problems as ours out of guilt or obligation and then crumble under the unmanageable load.

There is a difference between helping others and rescuing them. Rescuers always become victims or martyrs. They exceed their limits and discover life spinning out of control.

Superman was a fictional character, remember. Even Moses could not wear that cape forever.

**Thirdly, ask God and others for help and receive it when it comes.** The only request that Moses directly made in this prayer was that God take him out of this world if

nothing was going to change. I place a lot of value on the first word Moses used in this portion of his prayer and believe it reveals the hope imbedded in his heart for change. “If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now-if I have found favor in your eyes-and do not let me face my own ruin” Numbers 11:15.

That word “if” is significant for me. It revealed Moses’ belief that God could treat him differently and respond to his cry for help and this is exactly what God did. He devised a plan for Moses to receive help and empowered those that would assist him. Moses gladly welcomed them, shared his responsibilities with them and endorsed them as leaders even when Joshua challenged their authority.

I am sure you have heard the story about the man that was clinging to life on the roof of his house during a raging flood. He prayed for God to help him but perished nonetheless. When he stood before God in heaven he asked why God did not answer his prayer. God replied, “I sent a man in a boat and a helicopter to rescue you but you refused their help.”

Whose help are you ignoring today? Who has God sent your way to encourage you and help you carry your load that you have spurned?

Perhaps this is one reason you are here today. You need a church family that will accept you as you are, allow you to let off steam when you are under pressure, give you permission to live within your limits and offer a helping hand as you carry your load. If we can be that support group for you, we welcome you with open arms.