

God provides for his people  
Exodus 15-17

October 6, 2019  
Dan Hamel

I remember, as vividly as if it was yesterday, asking a man named Billy Henderson if he would be willing to grab lunch with me. The day was March 5, 2015. I had a question I wanted to ask him. Billy said, "Sure, let's meet at Texas Roadhouse." We ate lots of peanuts. I ordered sweet tea. He ordered a Diet Coke. They brought me grilled salmon, mashed potatoes and cinnamon apples; they brought him a steak salad. And then, after we had enjoyed our meal and a great discussion, I asked him if I could have his blessing to ask Keren to be my wife. And in a roundabout way, he said yes. And when the bill came, we both reached out to grab it. But I was a little younger and faster, and I got to it first. He said he'd like to pay. And I said, "Billy, you just gave me permission to ask your daughter to be my wife. This is the least I could do." He just smiled and said, "Dan, I always pay for my kids." And unless I am mistaken, over the course of 4 ½ years, that meal was the last meal Billy has ever allowed me to buy. As a father, he has both a desire and a commitment to provide for his children. That day I learned a lesson about my father-in-law. And that's the lesson the Israelites are learning in our passage of Scripture from today in the book of Exodus.

If you have your Bibles, will you turn with me to Exodus 15? You might remember that God's people were in slavery in Egypt. He called Moses to go to Pharaoh and set his people free. Pharaoh refused, but with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and the blood of the Passover lamb, God delivered his people. They journeyed into the wilderness where they found themselves at the Red Sea. Then Pharaoh's army showed up. He had a change of mind. He kind of liked having millions of slaves and wanted to bring them back. So with an enormous body of water in front of them and Pharaoh's army directly behind them, God parted the Red Sea and they walked through the water on dry ground. God delivered his people, and then they erupted into song. They praised him and glorified him for making a way when there seemed to be no way, and for destroying their enemies in the midst of the sea.

Now God's people are in the wilderness. They aren't slaves any longer, which is a good thing. And they aren't being pursued by Pharaoh's army any longer, which is a good thing. But there are between two and three million people in the middle of the wilderness and they have no idea how they are going to provide for themselves. There were no hotels. No restaurants. There were no grocery stores. There were no catering services. Try to put yourself in their situation. I know a lot of people who like to hike. And when they go on hikes, they get all geared up. They have Cliff Bars and Larabars and beef jerky and Nalgene and camelbacks. They have \$200 boots, breakaway pants for when they get hot, breathable shirts that keep their core body temperature consistent. And all of that is just for a three-hour stroll around Brown County. Think about what it would be like to be the Israelites....They are carrying everything they own on their backs. They've got no water. They have sunburns and cracked lips, dry throats and parched mouths. **15:22-24** **22 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. 23 When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.) 24 So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What are we to drink?"** Again, think about being in their position. Three days in the wilderness with nothing to drink, and then you finally look up into the distance and see water. You rub your eyes to make sure it's not a mirage. You ask your buddy if he sees it too because you don't want to be dreaming. Is that water?! Is that really water?! You haul off on a dead out sprint, plunge your head into the water to get a drink, (spit) and it's bitter - you can't drink it. Think about that. In the middle of the wilderness, first with no water, then with polluted water.

How do the people respond: they **grumbled**. The word grumble in Hebrew is *luwn* (loon), and the word technically means to lodge, to dwell, or to reside overnight. How interesting is that? What is grumbling? It's when you take note of something that you don't like, something that's not the way you want it to be (traffic was kind of bad, your food didn't come out warm, your spouse wasn't very respectful to you

yesterday), but instead of having that thought come in and go out, that thought comes in and it lodges in our minds, and takes up residence in our hearts. And once it has lodged in our minds and our hearts, grumbling comes out of our mouths. From the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks.

But God provided for them. 15:25 **Then Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became fit to drink.** Now you think that they would be thankful and that they would learn that God will provide for them, but take a look at 16:2-3 **2 In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. 3 The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”** They continued to grumble, and what did they say this time? Life was so much better in Egypt. Their hunger made them lose sight of reality. Think about what they are saying. They are basically remembering their time in Egypt as a free, lifetime membership to the Golden Corral buffet, where they could just sit around and have all the food they wanted! Never mind that you were slaves! That they beat you! That they threw your babies into the Nile to be eaten by crocodiles, and when that didn’t work they threw them into the Nile River. Their hunger and thirst made them delusional, they lost sight of reality.

God says, don’t worry: I will provide! 16:11-16 **11 The Lord said to Moses, 12 “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.’” 13 That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14 When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. 15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat. 16 This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Everyone is to gather as much as they need. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.’”** This time God met the needs of his people in two ways. He sent a flock of quail to descend on the camp so they could have meat. And then the next morning he sent them dew that turned into bread. When the people saw the dew they asked each other **“What is it?”** They had never seen anything like this before. Bread appearing from heaven. In Hebrew do you know how to pronounce: *“What is it?”* Manna. Manna means, *“What is it.”* And for 40 years in the wilderness, God sent them manna, he sent them bread from heaven so they would be sustained and have all they needed. He sent them manna every single morning. And he said when you go out and gather the manna (remember, there was enough to feed millions of people), you don’t have to hoard you don’t have to stockpile. You don’t have to save some for a rainy day. Just get what you need for that day because I’ll provide for you again tomorrow, and the day after that, and the day after that. What’s God doing here? He is teaching them daily dependence upon his provision. God always shows up. For them the phrase, *“His mercies are new every morning”* wasn’t just a poetic platitude. It was actually there, every single morning.

So surely, by this point, after all these miracles, after all these expressions of God’s provision, these people would learn that God is good, that God cares for them, and that God is going to take care of them. They don’t have to grumble; they just need to have faith. That’s what you would think ...but 17:1 **The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.** And instead of trusting God, what did they do??? **2 So they quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.” ...4 Then Moses cried out to the Lord, “What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.” 5 The Lord answered Moses, “Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. 6 I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink.” So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel.** So God provided again. In just these few chapters He turned bitter water sweet, he sent bread from heaven, gave them quail to eat, and he even brought water from a rock. What is God trying to do? He’s trying to teach them that he is a

good Father, who loves his children, and that he will always be faithful to provide for them. Clearly it took them a while to learn that lesson.

And as we've been saying all along, the book of Exodus isn't just their story, this is our story. When we look at the Israelites in this passage, we see ourselves. And just like the Israelites were learning to depend upon God, to rely upon him and trust him because he will provide, that's the journey we are on. I want to spend some time today asking this question: **What keeps us from fully trusting God?** Even though we have seen God's provision and favor in our lives again and again and again, what keeps us, like the Israelites, from fully trusting him. Knowing that he is good, why do we complain? Why do we grumble? Why do we murmur?

There are a lot of possible answers to this question. I want to explore a few with you today. Here's the first: **We don't fully trust God because we are still getting to know him.** That's the place the Israelites were in. They are just now learning who God is. They discovered God's name for the first time in chapter 4. They saw his power in chapters 7-14. Comparatively speaking, this is a brand-new relationship. They didn't trust him that much because they didn't know him that well. And that is entirely understandable. But as our time with God grows, as our experiences with God increase, our reasons to trust God multiply exponentially. We see again and again and again that God is a good, loving Father who delights to provide for his children.

This is something my son is learning right now. He is nine months old. And if he is well-rested and well-fed, he is the happiest little boy in the world. But what do you think happens the moment he gets hungry? It's like a switch is flipped. He starts crying like he is about to starve to death and the world is going to end! And he cries and cries and cries all the way up until the second bite of food is literally put right in his mouth. Our son has never gone more than a few hours without food. He has never gotten anywhere close to starving. But he still whines and cries every time he gets hungry. And why is that? Why does he whine and cry? Because he's a little baby. No big deal. We all understand that. And we expect that as he grows and matures, he will learn to trust his mom and his dad. Son, you don't have to worry. You don't have to whine and cry. We know your needs. We love you. It is our deepest joy and delight to take care of him. We would sooner die than let him starve. And as he matures, he'll get that. Just like our son is on a path to learn to trust us, the Israelites are on a path to learn to trust God, and so are we. Because God is good, because God is who he says he is, our trust in God will deepen as our relationship with him develops.

Sometimes we don't fully trust God because we are still getting to know him. Other times **We don't fully trust God because we have a scarcity mindset.** A scarcity mindset convinces us that there is not enough and that we have to fend for ourselves, scarp and hoard in order to survive. A scarcity mindset focuses on what we don't have, rather than on all that we do have. There is Hebrew Midrash that says when the 2 million people were walking through the red sea there were two men, Reuven and Shimon, who kept looking down at the sea bed. Apparently, it was a little wet still, like a beach at low tide, and they complained about the mud and said the mud was like the mud of Egypt. Think about that, they are standing in the middle of the red sea, a hundred feet of water on either side of them, and what are they doing, staring at the ground, complaining about the mud. They are focused on what they don't have, rather than on what they do have. **2 Corinthians 9:8 And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.** The difference between a scarcity mindset and an abundance mindset cannot be overstated.

<u>Scarcity mindset</u>	<u>Abundance mindset:</u>
<b>God: God is misery</b>	<b>God: God is generous</b>

<b>World: There's not enough</b>	<b>World: There's more than enough</b>
<b>Self: I have less than I deserve</b>	<b>Self: I have more than I deserve</b>
<b>Lifestyle: Hoarding</b>	<b>Lifestyle: Sharing</b>
<b>Speech: Grumbling</b>	<b>Speech: Giving thanks</b>

Because God is so good, so loving, so kind, so faithful, he wants us to have a mindset of abundance, but that is hard in the world we live in. The messaging of the world today is life is not good enough and we don't have enough. That is literally how marketers get you to buy their products. Your life is not good enough now. Give us your money and we'll give you this widget and your life will be better. That is literally how politicians get elected and entrusted with power. "The world is horrible," they say. You should be very dissatisfied. But vote for me, I'll make it better. Never mind the fact that nowadays we have better education, better security, better infrastructure, better health care, better lifespans, better technology, better jobs, better bank accounts than any time in recorded history! You'd think that we would be grateful, that we would focus on abundance. No, no, no. Don't focus on the walls of water all around you, focus on the mud. Even though the marketing messages of this world inundate us with scarcity, God wants us to see his provision, see his abundance, and know that we can trust him.

We don't fully trust God because we are still getting to know him because we have a scarcity mindset. ...another reason: **We don't fully trust God because we have a spirit of entitlement.** A spirit of entitlement says, ever so subtly "God owes me." or "I deserve this." But what does the truth of Scripture declare?

It says in **1 Corinthians 4:7 What do you have that you did not receive?** Everything in our lives is a gift from God. Everything! The fact that you are alive. The last breath you took, the last beat of your heart. What do you have that you did not receive? Nothing. Everything we have is a gift from God. How about Romans 11:35? "**Who has ever given to God that God should repay them?**" No matter what we do, God is not the one indebted to us, we are the ones indebted to him. God owes us nothing, yet has given us everything we have.

So we have to vigilantly be on our guard against entitlement creeping in, where we believe that God is obligated to do what we want him to do when we want him to do it, how we want him to do it. You may have seen that a few years ago the Pittsburgh Steelers were playing the Buffalo Bills in the playoffs. The game was tied and it went into overtime. The Bills made their way down the field and a perfect pass was thrown right into the hands of wide receiver Steven Johnson. He dropped it. **He sat there dejected**, as his team lost the game. He got on Twitter later that day and sent this message: "**I PRAISE YOU 24/7!!!!!! AND THIS HOW YOU DO ME!!!!!! YOU EXPECT ME TO LEARN FROM THIS???** HOW???! I'LL NEVER FORGET THIS!! EVER!!! I know it's hard losing a playoff game, but do you see what is at work behind this? Entitlement: "God, I praise you all the time, so I deserve to have you make me catch that ball." Now most of us don't expect God to help us win football games if we do enough good things, but have we found ourselves with more subtle versions of entitlement in our lives:

- Because I saved myself for marriage, God owes me the perfect spouse.
- Because we go to church and pray, God owes us healthy children.
- Because I give my tithe, God owes me financial stability.
- Because I have faith, God owes me a miraculous healing.

An entitlement mindset keeps us from fully trusting God. The opposite of entitlement is gratitude. If **entitlement** says: **God, you owe me.** **Gratitude** responds, **God, I thank you.** We see a beautiful picture

of this juxtaposition in Jesus' life. In Luke 17 Jesus sees ten lepers who ask him to heal them. He tells them to go to a priest, and as soon as they did, they were healed. Nine of the lepers were Jews, and when they were healed they just went on with their business. They thought God owed it to them. What did they do? They go on with their days. About time God took care of my problems! But one of the lepers was a Samaritan, a religious outsider, a man on the margins, and when he was healed, look at what he did: Luke 17:15-16 **15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. 16 He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him.**

That's the difference between entitlement and gratitude. Entitlement takes a gift assuming it was owed. Gratitude receives a gift and praises God in a loud voice, falling at the feet of Jesus. That is how we should begin every day, throwing ourselves at Jesus' feet and saying, "Thank you." I deserve nothing, but you have given me everything. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. God loves to hear those two simple words from his children.

There are several reasons why we don't fully trust God, (getting to know him, scarcity mindset, spirit of entitlement) but I want to talk about one more. **We don't fully trust God because we take our eyes off his provision.** The Israelites kept forgetting everything God had done for them, even the manna he gave them every morning. So God gave them a special command to keep their focus on his provision. In Exodus 16:32 **Moses said, "This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Take an omer of manna and keep it for the generations to come, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the wilderness when I brought you out of Egypt.'**" Every time they looked at the manna in that jar, they remembered what God had done for them and that he could be trusted to provide for them. And we have to do the same thing today, we have to focus on all that God has provided for us, and yes, we could talk about houses, cars, family, friends, clothes, food, clean water, vacations...the list could go on forever. But the ultimate provision, the ultimate gift God wants us to focus on is Jesus. And Jesus is in this passage. In John 6, Jesus feeds 5,000 people, and then they find him the next day and say, "Give us more food." Do you know what Jesus said, in John 6:51 **"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."** Jesus is the bread from heaven! It wasn't the manna sustaining them in the wilderness, it was Jesus. And he gave his flesh for the life of the world, Jesus is the one who sustains us. Listen to what it says in 1 Corinthians 10:4, speaking about the Israelites in the wilderness (This is a New Testament passage). **They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.** Christ was the one who sustained them in the wilderness. And Christ is the one who gives us living water. He says in John 4:14 **"Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."**

When God provided bread for them in the wilderness, do you know what he said in Exodus 16:7? **"In the morning you will see the glory of the Lord."** Yes, they did see the glory of God in the morning when the bread appeared, but think about that first Easter Sunday when Jesus rose from the dead. On that morning, we beheld the glory of the Lord. If we want to trust God we need to grow in our relationship with him, choose abundance over scarcity, choose gratitude over entitlement, and we keep our eyes on the provision of God--we keep our eyes on Jesus!