

If Only . . .

Taken From Numbers 11

Foundation

Pause for a moment to look around you and think about things you can be thankful for. If you're having a hard time thinking of something, ask God to show you what you should be thankful for. If you're still having a hard time, ask Him to help you *want* to be thankful.



When you're not happy with your circumstances or feel you've been treated unfairly, do you complain?

The initial excitement had died down. Mount Sinai was far behind, and it seemed their destination—the land of Canaan—lay a vast distance ahead. When would they reach this new land? Although each day of travel brought them a little closer to the Promised Land, no one knew how long their journey would take—except God, who was guiding them.

As long as God's presence hovered above the tabernacle—a cloudlike pillar by day and a column of fire by night—the Israelites stayed where they were. When it lifted, they'd pack up all their belongings and set out. It didn't matter whether they had been camping in one spot for a whole month or just a day; when the cloud moved, they knew it was time to follow. At the Lord's command they camped, and at the Lord's command they set out. No

advance notice, no warning, no planning, no pattern. They only knew that God was guiding them, reassuring them of His presence, and providing for their every need. But to some, this personal attention from God didn't seem good enough.

"Manna! Nothing to eat but manna! We're tired of this stuff!" some began to mutter under their breath.

Others nearby heard the complaints. "You're right," they chimed in. "The food was much better in Egypt."

"If only we had stayed there," some murmured as they looked out across the barren land. "Remember how we ate fish in Egypt for free? We even had cucumbers and melons. And just think of all those leeks, onions, and garlic! If only we hadn't left Egypt," they sighed.

The Israelites ignored all that God had done for them and forgot the slavery they suffered while in Egypt.

One man voiced what they were all thinking: "I would do *anything* for a taste of meat right now—anything to keep from eating this *manna!*"

And so the complaining continued. It didn't take long for the craving of their stomachs to become the desire of their hearts. It took even less time for a rebellious, ungrateful, complaining, and bitter attitude to develop among them.

When word of their complaining reached Moses, he poured out his frustration to God. "What am I to do with these people—Your people—Lord? They're becoming too much for me to deal with! They say they would be happy if only they had meat to eat! Where am I supposed to get meat in this barren land? Not even all the fish in the sea would be enough for them!" he added impatiently.

God listened to Moses' complaints and answered, "These people have rejected Me and what I have provided for them. I've heard their thankless and bitter complaints, and as a result, I will give them what they crave. Only it will not be meat for one meal, or even one day. Instead, I will give them enough meat to eat for a whole month, and they will eat it until it comes out of their nostrils and they detest it! I will do this because they have rejected My provision for them, saying, 'If only we hadn't left Egypt!'"

Then God caused a strong wind to blow some migrating quail off course so that they flew only three feet from the ground and were easily caught. All that day and

night, and even into the next day, the Israelites gathered quail.

“So long, manna; hello *meat!*” the Israelites said as they eagerly collected, cooked, and prepared the quail. “Now this is more like it!”

But in the middle of their meal, God brought judgment upon them. Those who had turned their backs on Him and traded His provision for something they craved experienced the consequences of their choice. What they thought would bring life and satisfaction only brought death.

Before moving onward, the Israelites named that place *Kibroth Hattaavah* (which means “graves of craving”) and buried all those who had died from eating the quail. Unfortunately, they didn’t bury their root problem of complaining. That was one of their first mistakes.

Quail were birds that lived in Egypt and the Holy Land but also migrated north in the springtime (March). They often flew over the narrow portions of the sea to get from one land mass to another and became exhausted. God used a strong wind to blow them over to the Israelite’s camp

Footwork

Look up Numbers 11:4-6 (preferably in the *New International Version* of the Bible). In each verse are some “key” words we tend to use when we complain. Can you pick them out? (*Hint: The key complaining words in verse 4 are the same as the title of today’s devotion. Verse 5 has something to do with comparing our current situation with the past, and the key complaining word in verse 6 is the opposite of “always.”*) Are you guilty of using any of these words in your vocabulary?

Fruit

God doesn't expect you never to complain, but He does expect you to bring your complaints to Him. Moses complained directly to God, but the Israelites just complained.

God wants you to tell Him what you're experiencing. Don't be afraid to admit to Him your deepest feelings, failings, angers, and hurts. (He already knows them anyway and is only waiting for you to bring them to Him.) Thank Him for who He is. He is much bigger, stronger, and more powerful than you think. And ask Him to help you with your attitudes, feelings, circumstances, and problems. An easy way to remember this is to think of the word ta ta—tell, admit, thank, ask.

Stop right now and talk to God using this method. Whenever you catch yourself slipping into a complaining mode, you have the power to say "So long!" ("Ta ta!") to it, if only you'll take your worries and complaints to God.