

*D.J. Reed*  
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“Gotta Go Through It”  
“Need”

*Chilson Hills Church*  
Howell, MI

Exodus 16:2-15

In the film, “Everything Must Go,” Will Ferrell portrays a man named Nick who is fired from his company after 16 years of faithful service for repeated offenses stemming from his alcoholism.

When Nick returns home, he finds that he has been kicked out of his home by his wife who is fed up with Nick’s behavior. She has left the house, changed the locks, the combination for the security alarms and has taken all of Nick’s things and has placed them on the front lawn.

So, instead of vacating the premises, for the next 6 or 7 days, Nick lives on his front lawn, kicking back on his favorite leather recliner and downing six packs of Pabst Blue Ribbons. He reconnects with his neighbors, considers his own life, comes to grip with his past, and considers what stuff is needed and what must go.

And slowly, bit by bit, when facing this incredible time of need, Nick discovers what is truly significant and how he must change the his life.

The passage that was read earlier finds the Israelites in a time of crisis and need as well. They came to a massive “closed door,” a great sea, with angry The Egyptians behind them.

They couldn’t go around it. They couldn’t go over it. They couldn’t go under it. They had to go through it.

So, they waited all night by this “closed door” to see if God would make a way for them. And God did make a way for them. God would open that closed door – but Israel needed to have faith, to trust in the God that would fight for them and pull out the stops to free them as a people.

Now the Israelites find themselves completely free with no Egyptians in their rearview mirror, in the middle of the wilderness and they have nothing to eat. Nothing.

And so, the people begin to complain. This “complaining” is something you will read about often in the book of Exodus. Prepare yourself.

The Israelites will complain every time they face hardship. They will complain when they are without water, without food, when God talks too much and when God is silent. They will complain over and over again.

This is their modus operandi, their default setting, their trigger response when they don’t have enough or they don’t have what they want. When they don’t have what they need, they complain.

I was listening to an audio clip from John Boehner, the Speaker of the House of Representatives the other day. It’s been another week of wrangling and bickering between Republicans and Democrats about the economy and job creation this week and Speaker Boehner gave just one of the many speeches which proposed solutions.

Speaker Boehner, said, of course, that he was willing to work with The President to find “common ground.” And then he went on to say something that has been widely heard in political speeches these days. He said, “It’s not the American people that are at fault for this, it’s the government that has failed the hard-working American people.”

Of course, he has to say that, because if he flipped it around and placed the responsibility on us good, hard-working people, it would be political suicide. It has to be the government’s fault. Right?

They’re the ones that have got us into this mess. They’re the ones that have saddled us with so much debt. They’re the ones who got us into two grueling wars. They’re responsible for letting Wall Street run roughshod over us.

Oh, and while we’re on Wall Street, yeah, they’re to blame too. They played around with our money and took unnecessary risks. It’s because of their

unchecked, unethical financial practices our companies went bankrupt and our retirement funds lost all their values.

Oh, and while I'm on our companies... they're to blame too. It's because of those rich CEO's and company executives, that wages for hard-working Americans was so low. It's because of them that China is the global economic behemoth and why we're so dependent on foreign oil from the Middle East.

And while we're on China and the Middle East... they're largely to blame for the decline of Western Civilization, Capitalism and... the decline of Christianity. It's the fault of the Communists and the Muslims that we are losing the battle for souls. It's because of them that our country is becoming more pluralistic and why political correct vocabulary dominates our conversation these days.

It's because of the Muslims and the Communists... and Hollywood... and homosexuals... that God is no longer celebrated, affirmed and worshipped like God once was back in the 50's... or maybe the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, or in the 1800's... or in during the founding of our nations.

It used to be that we were a Christian nation, a country bursting with wealth. Everyone was working, families were happy, women were pretty and men were handsome and clean shaven. It used to be that everyone shared the same values and the same faith. And now that's all gone.

Have we come all this way as a country to die in the wilderness of relativism, socialism, political activism, and communism?

Have we come all this way to die in a land with a shaky social security, drained 401K's, a dysfunctional healthcare system, low salaries and a president who some say is a Muslim!

We want to go back! We want to go back to the way it was! We want to go back to the time when

we sat around tables filled with meat and potatoes, held hands and said grace.

We want to go back to the golden days, the best days of our lives when right was right and wrong was wrong, black was black and white was white.

**WE WANT TO GO BACK!**

My, oh my. That doesn't sound like something we just read does it?

The Israelites complained that they didn't have food. And they said to their leaders, Moses and Aaron, "Why didn't God let us die in comfort in Egypt where we had lamb stew and all the bread we could eat?"

When they came to a time of need, a time when they didn't have the necessities for life, they embraced nostalgia. They created a golden era of memories in their mind.

But here's the problem with nostalgia: it's not accurate. Nostalgia is embraced when we face a crisis or insecurity or disillusionment. And it's also based on our imperfect memories which selects the positive, heart-warming memories but forgets the troubling difficult things.

Stephanie Coontz wrote a book back in 2000 called, "The Way We Never Were." And her premise in the book is that we have romanticized the "Leave It To Beaver" family model of the 50's believing this is the way we were – peaceful, orderly, stable and virtuous.

But in actuality, the family of the 50's was rife with conflict, repression and anxiety. We have elevated the post-WWII, "Ozzie and Harriet" culture, but in actuality that society had many problems of its own; problems like racism, exclusivity, and sexism.

Doesn't Barbra Streisand sing about the inadequacy and unreliability of dwelling on nostalgia?

Mem'ries,  
Light the corners of my mind  
Misty water-colored memories  
Of the way we were  
Scattered pictures,  
Of the smiles we left behind  
Smiles we gave to one another  
For the way we were  
Can it be that it was all so simple then?  
Or has time re-written every line?  
If we had the chance to do it all again  
Tell me, would we? Could we?  
Mem'ries, may be beautiful and yet  
What's too painful to remember  
We simply choose to forget  
So it's the laughter  
We will remember  
Whenever we remember...  
The way we were...

Memories are unreliable. We choose to forget, and we choose to remember what we want to remember, believing this is the way things were, and therefore, this is the way it all should be.

The Israelites were facing a crisis, a time of need. They believed freedom would lead to having everything they needed and everything they wanted. Life would be better. We should be having consistent annual GDP growth, and greater comfort. We should feel more secure and have more wealth, and we should all feel as if we are moving in the right direction.

But the people didn't feel this way because they didn't have what they needed and what was familiar to them. So they complained against Moses and Aaron. Or they thought they were complaining against Moses and Aaron.

Moses tells the people, "This evening you will know that it is God who brought you out of Egypt; and in the morning you will see the Glory of God. Yes, he's listened to your complaints against him. You haven't been complaining against us, you know, but against God."

And then Moses says, "Come near to God. He's heard your complaints."

And then Aaron turns the whole nation of Israel to face the wilderness and God's Glory was visible in the Cloud.

They thought glory was the wealth, splendor, prestige and extravagance of Egypt, but when they drew near to God, they discovered what true glory was.

They turned their face away from nostalgia, away from Egypt and looked to the barren wilderness and they saw there what they never expected to find: they found that it wasn't empty and deathly, no, they found that it was more brilliant than Egypt. And they learned that God would exceed their wildest expectations in the wilderness and that there they could find all that they needed.

God, as one commentator put it, would completely redefine the wilderness.

I know that this is a time of great need. It's a time of great need for our country; we haven't felt this insecure since The Great Depression. Our country needs jobs, income, growth and security.

At the center of this recession are the people of Michigan. No one feels the plight of hard-working people more than Michigan. We have every right to complain. Several decades ago, we had it all. We were living The Dream in a middle class utopia.

But now, families are working harder than they ever had and are making less than they ever had.

And we long for the days when one parent could work, pay the bills and take a vacation to Disney World. We long for the days when we could have Sundays off, relax at our cabins by the lake and admire our Jet Ski's in the water. We mourn that loss.

But what many of us do is turn on FOX News or CNN and we expect our leaders to be working hard to get this life back. But, instead, we find our leaders failing. We find them bickering and suddenly we find ourselves complaining.

So we make posts on Facebook, we forward e-mails, and grumble over cups of coffee focusing on the past glory, but ignoring the glory God is ready to show us in our wilderness of need.

Have you ever considered that all your complaining that some might call “free speech,” might, in fact, be faithless grumbling against the will of God?

What if the need we all feel so profoundly is actually drawing us closer to God, shaping a deeper, stronger faith?

What if we turned toward our wilderness of need instead of away from it?

What if we believed that our glory wasn't faded or in the past and instead believed that God's glory could be seen right here and right now in the wilderness of our need, that God is prepared to surprise us and provide for us in ways that we never thought was possible.

Several weeks ago, Scott Runyon and I went down to the Brightmoor Community to tour the dilapidated neighborhoods Scott and the handful of middle school students visited earlier in the summer.

And it was fascinating to see what Rit, the leader of this community and numerous other volunteers have been able to do in this one-time middle class jewel in Detroit.

Rit hasn't torn down houses to create “McMansions” or re-gentrify the properties. And she hasn't sought out to restore the glory of the 50's or return the Brightmoor community to the way some of you remember.

Instead, she has led a plucky group of residents and a supportive host of volunteers to redeem the neighborhoods that are littered with abandoned, crumbling, burnt-out houses. She sets out to take what is available and accessible and makes it into something beautiful.

For example, they took an old house that filled with medical waste, cleaned it out in a week, tore down the walls, and made it into an outdoor stage. They created permanent wooden benches at the side of the house and then cleared out trees to make a ¾ acre lot into a small, but beautiful park.

And that's not all they're doing, they have cleared lots, built nature trails and community gardens where potatoes, tomatoes, kale, raspberries and zucchinis are ready to be harvested for consumption or the market.

They have taken the barren space, their environment that some would say is a wasteland, and they are making it beautiful – but beautiful in a way that is unexpected.

Sisters and brothers, communities like Brightmoor are a reminder to us that in our need, God's glory can be seen. God's glory can be found in the most unexpected places. God's provision can come from the most barren of places.

Complaining gets us nowhere. In fact, if we look at the example of the Israelites, complaining confuses us and ignores what God is doing right now, right here in our lives.

Complaining blinds us to God's activity and robs us of hope. It robs us of the excitement of faith.

But if we turn to our need and look for God at work in the midst of our need, God just might surprise us with the beating of bird wings and bread from heaven.

## LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

For Sunday, September 18, 2011's Sermon

Foundational Scripture: Exodus 16:2-15 <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=183015074>

**Featured Scripture Reflection:** “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not.’” – Exodus 16:4 <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=183015104>

**Opening Icebreaker:** Think about a time when you received an unexpected gift (i.e. – a bonus, a present, a win, etc.). What did you do with that gift? How did it change you or your perspective?

### Scripture Questions

#### What is the scripture saying?

- Read Exodus 16:2-15. <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=183015074> What stands out to you about this story? What questions does it raise?
- Read Exodus 16:16-36. <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=183015154> What words or phrases stand out to you when you read this passage? How does this passage add to your understanding of the previous passage you were just discussing?
- Read Luke 12:13-21. <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=183015186> Think about what you've just read. How does it compliment what was read in the previous passages?

#### How is God speaking through Scripture?

- What is the “Good News” in these passages of Scripture?
- After discussing and pondering these passages, how do these passages affect me?
- How are these passages troubling or confusing?

#### God's word

- What is God's invitation to you?

#### A prayer

Gracious and loving God, you have given me enough for today. Help me to be content with what I have and give me peace about what I don't have.