

## INTRODUCTION

A guy named Frank had a stressful job with long hours. He realized that he had to take a step back and reorganized his life. He asked the company for a year of no-pay leave. He went to a monastery to have a personal retreat. A monk showed Frank around, then they sat down in the office. The monk told Frank: “We have a rule here that everyone has to remain in complete silence. You are only allowed to say two words at the end of every two months.” “I can handle that,” said Frank confidently. The first two months felt like two years to him. Finally, Frank uttered two words to his mentor: “Bed hard.” The monk replied: “No problem, we can change the bed for you.” Another two months had passed. Frank grumbled again: “Food cold.” The older guy responded: “Sure, we can address that.” Frank had enough of his quiet time at the end of six months. He told the monk: “I quit.” “I’m not surprised about that,” said the monk, “You did nothing but grumbling since day one. Aren’t we all like Frank in some ways? We want a trouble-free life. Does anyone among us want to be laid-off from work? Have a car break-down? A toothache? Like them or not, problems will keep coming. Therefore, what matters is how you react to a challenge and how you resolve it. The Israelites met a new crisis. Food was running low. At this point they had left Egypt exactly one month. Where could they find resources in the desert to feed so many people? So far, the Israelites had grumbled three times already. They grumbled when they saw the Egyptian army pursuing them. At the end of chapter 15 they grumbled when they could not find water. Now they grumbled when there was a lack of food. God was leading the Israelites into an unknown territory. They had much to learn about trusting God. Have you ever felt like that? You may also be heading toward an unknown territory – a new job, new school or new stage in life. From this episode of Israel’s history let us learn that God will fulfill our needs wherever He leads us to.

## EXPLANATION

### 1. Warning: Low on Faith 警號：信心不足

First of all, the Israelites were showing some warning signs of getting low on faith. We should watch out for those signs as we walk with the Lord by faith.

#### A. Exaggerate 誇大

The first sign is to exaggerate the problem. Listen to how the Israelites grumbled to Moses and Aaron about their food shortage in **verse 3**: “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.” The Israelites put the blame on Moses and Aaron for taking them out of Egypt. They would rather die with a full stomach than to slowly starve to death. Did they really have unlimited buffet before? We cannot verify that because the Bible does not mention it. The current problem made them interpret their past differently. They exaggerated the problem because their emotion was getting ahead of their mind. Of all they said, one important aspect was missing. They used to be slaves. They were now

free. They completely forgot that God liberated them from bondage to make them His people. What would they rather be? Slaves or free people? Laboring for Pharaoh reluctantly or serving God joyfully? When we grumble more than likely we will exaggerate the problem. We say to ourselves: “If I do not work for this boss I will not have to face his attitude and harsh demand.” “If I do not take this course I will not have to complete all the assignments and tests.” “If I do not marry this person I will not (you fill in the blank) ...” You can keep pushing things to the extreme and say: “If I do not exist in this world then I do not have to deal with all these troubles!” Where is your gratitude to the Lord? Let us face it: problems come with the package. They are part of God’s blessings to you. He puts you in this job, this course and this relationship so that He can test your faith. Instead of exaggerating the problem ask the Lord for wisdom and strength to solve it. Ask Him what lesson He is teaching you from it.

### B. Escalate 升級

Not only did the Israelites exaggerate their problem, they also escalated their grumbling to God. The people were upset about Moses and Aaron. As Moses stated in **verse 8** the Israelites in fact escalated the problem to God: ... “You will know that it was the Lord when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord.” Moses knew that the people were escalating their grumbling toward God. Moses and Aaron were like working in the customer service department. Of all the phone calls those agents receive, more than likely they are complaints from unhappy customers. People are not satisfied with the products or services. Those agents do not own the business. But they have to take all the heat from the customers. Moses and Aaron swallowed all the criticism from the people. The Israelites dared not to say: “God, why do you put us in this situation?” Those of us who serve as leaders in the church have to know against whom people are grumbling. We need to humbly admit our mistakes if we are being negligent. However, we can burn out easily and have nervous breakdown if we hold ourselves accountable for all the blame. At one time I was overwhelmed by the conflicts in the previous church I served. One day I prayed to God as I was driving home, saying: “Lord, I don’t want to dump all the trash to my family members. It’s unfair to them. Let nothing take away the joy I have in you.” After that prayer God lifted the burden from my heart like flipping a switch. I could sing along with the gospel songs from the radio until I got home. The lesson for us is to discern to whom we are grumbling. Do not vent your anger toward people. Instead, ask the Lord for help to examine your heart.

### C. Accumulate 屯積

The Israelites exaggerated their problem, and they escalated their grumbling to God. The third sign of their being low on faith was that they accumulated God’s blessings for themselves. God graciously provided food to His people despite their grumbling. Look at **verses 13-15**: 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.” The quail might be a one-time provision of meat. The bread, however, became the main food God provided for the Israelites in the next 40 years. God was full of humor. The word “manna” in Hebrew means

“What is this?” The Israelites questioned: “What is this?” That became the name for the food. The Israelites ground the manna into flour and made bread from it. God gave them specific instructions on how to collect the food. Six days a week they were to go out in the morning to pick the amount they needed. No one should accumulate the food overnight. Some people did not follow the order. The leftover food was spoiled the next day. God also asked them to pick up double the portion of manna the day before the Sabbath, which is Saturday in our calendar nowadays. The food stayed fresh the next day. However, some people still went out to the field on the Sabbath, hoping to get more manna. But they could not find any. The Israelites accumulated food because they were afraid that there would not be enough for the next day. Most people were farmers in the Bible times. Whenever there was a harvest, they would reap and store all they could find in the field. There were unknown factors like weather and pests. But God taught them not to worry about food for tomorrow. One day, two day and all through the 40 years He would provide for them. God cared for the Israelites and He cares for us too. It is a Biblical principle to plan for the future. We should be wise stewards of the resources God entrusts us. There may be unexpected expenses like house repairs or medical costs. However, we should not accumulate wealth out of insecurity. We should not accumulate God’s blessings just for our personal enjoyment either. God blesses us so that we can bless others.

## 2. Warming: Rich in Grace 溫馨：恩典充足

We have to avoid the signs of running low on faith. Instead, we have to always remember that God is rich in grace.

### A. Provider 供應源頭

By raining manna from above God assured the Israelites that He was the Provider for their needs. Read **verse 6**: ... “In the evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt.” It took faith for the Israelites to go to bed every night and expected that there would be a supply of manna the next morning. It required a bigger faith to eat the same food day after day for forty years and not getting tired of it. The Israelites could compile a recipe book for cooking manna – roasted, congee, sautéed, deep-fried, etc. Your kids may complain if you cook the same food for three straight nights: “Mom, not this again!” I grew up in a poor family. My mom had a day job and she was not a 5-star chef. I learned to enjoy whatever it was on the table. We ate three meals a day and there was hardly any money left for snack. I now teach my kids to always give thanks to God. Before we eat we say grace for the food, then we also show appreciation to the person who prepares the food. Whenever my kids grumble because they do not like the food I will remind them: “Hey boys, remember to eat with a grateful heart.” When we remember that God is our ultimate Provider we will not take His blessings for granted. When you get up tomorrow morning you have to give thanks to God for a new day, and for the capability to make a living. Don’t grumble over minor things. Your hair may spike up like TV antennas. There may be pimples or fine-lines on your face. Other drivers on the road may not be as gentle as you are. But that is okay. Every day is full of new opportunities to know God and experience His faithfulness.

### B. Priority 優先次序

God did not only remind the Israelites He was their Provider, He also told them to get their life priority right. See **verses 29-30** – 29 “Bear in mind that the Lord has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day; no one is to go out.” 30 So the people rested on the seventh day. This is the first mention of the Sabbath in the Bible. From then on, the Israelites would pick manna six days a week, then rested on the Sabbath. When the Israelites put God first they did not need to be anxious about food. Some of you like to eat at Chick-fil-A. But you cannot go there on Sunday. Why? It is not open on Sunday. The late founder of the restaurant, Truett Cathy, was a Christian. He loved the Lord. He wanted to give their employees rest on Sunday so that they can be with their families. Whether or not they go to church to worship God is their choice. The company’s headquarters is in Atlanta. During the 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympics the restaurant chain remained closed on Sunday. The company did not worry about making less money. The executives understand that if they honor God first, God will bless their business. Later on, when the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai God gave them further instructions on animal sacrifice and worship. Therefore, the idea of the Sabbath was to dedicate one day a week to worship God. Nowadays we have a different pace of life. Your occupation may require you to work on Sunday. But the principle has not changed. We need to set our priority right, lest our busyness or laziness may distract us from the Lord. How important do you see your relationship with God? How often do you read the Bible? How often do you attend church to worship God? Even when you come do you arrive on time and is your heart ready to praise God?

### C. Proof 可靠明證

God affirmed that He was the Provider. The observance of the Sabbath reminded the Israelites to put God at the top priority. The manna was also a proof of God’s faithfulness to the future generations. God asked His people to save up some manna for their descendants to see. **Verse 32** reads: 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 desert when I brought you out of Egypt.’” The specimen of manna served as a proof that God provided for their ancestors. One omer is about two quarts. It is like two small transparent boxes of berries you buy from a grocery store. God preserved this manna and so it would not go bad. God continued to provide manna until the Israelites stepped into Canaan. **Joshua 5:12** recorded: The manna stopped the day after they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate of the produce of Canaan. That happened after the Israelites had crossed the River Jordan and were about to conquer Jericho. From then on, they would start eating the local food in Canaan. The parents had a wonderful story about manna to tell their children. We all need some reminders of the most important things in life. Recently, I read a story about a woman who was pondering on filing a divorce. She just felt tired of the relationship. One day she was looking inside her husband’s wallet for no particular reason. The man was a well-organized guy and so he did not keep any junk. She found a tiny little piece of paper. It was from their first date when the man wrote down her phone number. He cherished the memory for all these years. This lady commented that the paper saved her marriage. It was a proof that the man still loved her. What do you use to remind yourself of God’s love for you? It may be an old picture taken at your baptism, or a Bible given by your parents. Of the many book-marks I have there is one that I received at a summer camp when I decided to commit myself for full-time ministries. A little keepsake can bring back many beautiful memories. It

serves as a proof that God had been faithful to you since you received Him as your Savior and Lord. He will be faithful to the end.

## CONCLUSION

God will fulfill our needs wherever He leads us to. There was no need to panic when we face a new problem. Every day is an opportunity to experience God's grace. Little by little, our faith in God will continue to grow. One day my younger son asked me: "Dad, why did God create mosquito?" He sweats a lot and so he always attracts mosquitoes. No one likes the itch and the bumps. How would you answer his question? The biologist inside me told him that God made mosquitoes because they are part of the food chain. Mosquitoes eat something, and there is something else that feed on them. But if you think more about it, that was a deep theological question. Why would God allow us to face hardship when none of us enjoys suffering? Of course, God has no fun in watching us in pain. He wants our faith to grow out of the situation. When people relocated to another city I like to encourage them with the following words: new place, new challenges but same God.