

**Series: SO YOU WANNA GO BACK TO EGYPT - May 30, 2010**

**WADING OUT WHEN YOU CAN'T SWIM  
Numbers 13-14, Joshua 3**

1. In life, everyone faces something you could call a **defining moment**. If you have **never** faced a defining moment—you probably missed it! Let me describe a defining moment—and I think you'll understand.

-It was December, 1955 in Alabama. A bus driver on the public transit system picked up several white passengers and demanded that Rosa Parks give up her seat to accommodate them. **[pic]** But Rosa was **tired** of giving in. Rosa was **tired** of the inequity and injustice in a country that said that **all** people are created **equal**. So Rosa refused. The driver said, "If you don't stand up, I'm going to have to call the police and have you arrested." Rosa said, "You **may** do that!" He did. **[pic]**

-**That** was a defining moment. For her. For the whole bus system—which was boycotted—and for the entire Civil Rights movement. That day, Rosa Parks—who was humiliated in front of an entire bus jammed with people—also walked into the history books. **That** was Rosa's defining moment. Even the **bus** is on display! **[pic]**  
-Defining moments are not usually that famous—or that profound. A defining moment is a time when we take a courageous step toward doing what we **know** is right—but is **scary**. And when this moment is too scary—or we're too busy or apathetic—we **pass**. No one may ever know—but **we** do.

2. Today we're going to talk about a defining moment an **entire nation** passed on. The story line is that God has been on a mission ever since sin sabotaged both the people and the planet He created. But the family He chose—Abraham's descendants—has become a nation of slaves in Egypt. So He dramatically extricates them—and **then** begins forming them into His people. People who will honor Him, trust Him, and take the land He's promised to them and to their ancestors.

-The problem is that they **don't** trust Him—even after watching Him at work in amazing ways. He's established a covenant with them—that they will be His special treasure—and He will be their God. And people will see what He's like by watching them.

-In this process, they face what, for them, will be their defining moment. God didn't just extricate them from Egypt to become a massive tent city of 3 million wanderers. All along He's promised them a **place**. God had made that clear to Moses before he even signed on as their leader.

**The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. (Exodus 3:7-8 TNIV)**

- a. All through this entire story of Abraham and the people of Israel—God is either telling them about the land He will give to them—or referring back to the land He gave them. This story is so ingrained in their history that when Joseph dies, he tells the family, “When you leave, take my bones with you!” It’s a little creepy—but they do!
- b. And the land is a **good** land—because God is a **good** God; He loves His creation—delights in all that it offers—so much so that He wants to completely restore it and renew it. And God is **glad** to give His people **good** gifts! One of the phrases used most often to describe this **place** is that it is **flowing with milk and honey**. What that’s saying is that it is rich land—where livestock can be grazed—and milk produced—and where bees thrive because of the wildflower, clover and fruit tree blossoms. Listen to Moses’ description:

**For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills. (Deuteronomy 8:7-9 TNIV)**

- c. The point is that, as tough and demanding as the journey from Egypt was—the destination was **amazing!** And God would use the Israelites and their land and their health and their worship as an example for the nations. This model community would show God to be wise, loving, kind and holy. Loving and following God wasn’t just healthy and good—it was **smart!**

-This community would be just and fair. Women would be treated with equality and dignity; sex would be taken out of the gutter—and away from the pollution of disease and pain—and protected with marriage. This was a community where generosity and kindness and love were promoted—and God was respected and trusted!

3. But **trusting** and **respecting** God was where the Hebrew people struggled. When things didn’t go as they wanted, they grumbled. When Moses didn’t lead them where they wanted to go, they grumbled. They grumbled when they were afraid, when they were hungry, when they were thirsty. Grumbling, complaining, rebelling—was their back up plan for **any** obstacle. And their attitude disrespected Moses—and showed contempt for God. And when it came to receiving the gift of a home land from God, they hit the wall.

-Two years after leaving Egypt, God led Israel to a place called **Kadesh Barnea**—right across the Jordan River from the land God had promised them. They were **right on the cusp** of rest! Their own land! Moses said:

**"You have reached the hill country of the Amorites, which the LORD our God is giving us. See, the LORD your God has given you the land. Go up and take possession of it as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, told you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." (Deuteronomy 1:20-21 TNIV)**

-The 12 scouts Moses sent to check on the land brought back a mixed report. Yes, this land was everything God had promised--better than anything they'd ever seen. Get this—a single cluster of grapes they found had to be carried on a pole between two men!

-But there was a problem:

**...The people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. (Numbers 13:28 TNIV)**

-Now, you have to understand that the phrase, *descendants of Anak*, struck terror into the hearts of everyone. In our culture, it would be a little like saying, "**They have strategic nuclear weapons.**" The **Anakites** were a race of giants that were renowned for their strength and ability as warriors. You may remember the story of David, as a young man, taking down a massive warrior named Goliath—a descendant of the Anakites who was 9 ½ feet tall.

-But two spies, Caleb and Joshua, said:

**"We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it." (Numbers 13:30 TNIV)**

Well that drove the other 10 spies into exaggeration mode.

**"The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them." (Numbers 13:32-33 TNIV)**

-**This** was their defining moment! Would they go forward—or not? Would they believe that the same God parted the sea, routed the Egyptian army, guided them, gave them water and fed them—would complete his promise and give them a land of their own?

- a. This report scared these people have to death. And fear is usually what drives anger. Moses had a full-scale rebellion on his hands. Same old thing as before, "God hates us—he brought us here to die—let's find a leader who will take us back to Egypt!" And then they began to talk about stoning Caleb and Joshua! Well, God showed up. Listen to His words:

b.

**"How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them? I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they." (Numbers 14:11-12 TNIV)**

-Moses begs God to pardon them—for the sake of His reputation, based on his unmatched compassion and mercy. And God relents, but the price tag on their **contempt**—on refusing to go forward is steep. He sends them back to the

wilderness for 40 years—until this entire rebellious generation has died off. Then these chilling words: **Then you will discover what it is like to have me for an enemy.’ I, the LORD, have spoken! I will certainly do these things to every member of the community who has conspired against me. (Numbers 14:34b-35a NLT)**

- b. Well, **then** the people change their minds. In another act of defiance, they say, “No, no, we’re repenting—and **now** we’re ready to take the land!” Against Moses orders, they try to do that—and get chased back to their camp. Then they head back to the wilderness.

-The **great and terrible wilderness**, as Moses called it, is not a nice place. It was hot and dry—little vegetation—occupied by mainly scorpions, snakes—and vultures. You read this and think, “Wow! God’s being quite vindictive! It’s like He sent his people to **hell!**” Actually, what God does is redemptive. In his final message to God’s people, Moses said:

**“Be careful to obey all the commands I am giving you today. Then you will live and multiply, and you will enter and occupy the land the LORD swore to give your ancestors. Remember how the LORD your God led you through the wilderness for these forty years, humbling you and testing you to prove your character, and to find out whether or not you would obey his commands. Yes, he humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with manna, a food previously unknown to you and your ancestors. He did it to teach you that people do not live by bread alone; rather, we live by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. For all these forty years your clothes didn’t wear out, and your feet didn’t blister or swell. Think about it: Just as a parent disciplines a child, the LORD your God disciplines you for your own good. (Deuteronomy 8:1-5 NLT)**

- c. Do you see God’s perspective on this time? It was training. Boot camp. He was **humbling** them and **testing** them to see if they would actually follow Him and obey Him. Why? Because this whole thing was about God’s mission—not them having nice little cushy homes to settle down in! If they weren’t ready to be His people—then they weren’t ready to settle the land. If he had just cleaned out the land and handed it to them—what do you think they would’ve done? My guess is—**flipped Him off!** **“We got what WE want—later, Dude!**

-The problem is—this was a **community**—which meant that **everyone**—even the faithful people—had to go back to the wilderness.

-**Question:** How many of you think that punishment and discipline are the same thing? Punishment is about someone paying for what they’ve done. **Discipline** is about **growth**. Why do parents discipline a child? The alternative is usually a spoiled child that self-destructs. The point of discipline is to help a child say **no** when they need to say **no**; to say **yes** when they need to say **yes**—and **when** they say **yes** or **no**—to be able to actually pull it off.

4. The book of Joshua records the moment when the whole nation of Israel returned to the **exact place** they had been 40 years before. Most of the people had never even **seen** it before—and it was a distant memory for the oldest people. The record tells us that all the men old enough to fight back then—20 years and older--had died off. And the question was—would they cross and fight **this** time? Or would they balk and whine and rebel out of fear? Interesting, in this record, I don't hear **one** voice saying, ***We wanna go back to Egypt!***

-God's instructions to Joshua are very simple:

**“Be strong and courageous, for you are the one who will lead these people to possess all the land I swore to their ancestors I would give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the instructions Moses gave you. Do not deviate from them, turning either to the right or to the left. Then you will be successful in everything you do. (Joshua 1:6-7 NLT)**

-So Joshua **tells** the people, “Get ready—we're going to cross the river and take the land in 3 days!” This is **way** different! This time the leaders at the front of his army are telling **him**, “Be strong and courageous!” Oh, by the way--do you think it's a coincidence that Joshua **secretly** sends out **two** spies—the exact number who were faithful before?

- a. What happens with the spies is **amazing**. As you may know, they go to **one** city, Jericho, to check it out. They stay with Rahab, a temple prostitute whose home is built into the wall. Not only does she cover for them and hide them, ***listen to her testimony about God!***

**“I know the LORD has given you this land,” she told them. “We are all afraid of you. Everyone in the land is living in terror. For we have heard how the LORD made a dry path for you through the Red Sea when you left Egypt...No wonder our hearts have melted in fear! No one has the courage to fight after hearing such things. For the LORD your God is the supreme God of the heavens above and the earth below. (Joshua 2:9-10a, 11 NLT)**

-Just **think** about that for a minute! Forty years earlier, the spies had scared the people by saying, “These people are too big, their cities are too strong! We're like grasshoppers! Their walls are too high!” They had **no** idea that God's reputation for humbling the super-power of that day had melted the **enemies** hearts with fear! These people were shaking in their boots!

- b. Well, they have to cross the Jordan River. Now, to people who live between Lake Ontario and Georgian Bay—the Jordan looks like a piece of cake (**pics**). You do have to remember that most of these people had never seen the Nile, and had only heard about God parting the sea to bring them out of Egypt. Oh, yeah—and in the wilderness, there are only shallow watering holes, so all the lifeguards stopped giving swimming lessons. My point? These people could've drowned in a bath tub! And the Jordan was at flood stage. Ever been close to even a small river at flood stage? They are scary muddy places that carry away trees, bridges and entire houses!

-The way God calls them forward is a *fascinating* picture of faith. He has the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant walk right up to the water's edge—and wade out. It's when they actually *wade out* that the water upstream stops flowing. And then the Israelites walk through on dry ground. To make sure they don't forget what God has done, Joshua has leaders from the 12 tribes take stones from the middle of the river—and then he builds a monument.

- c. The conquest, as it's recorded in the book of Joshua is almost a mockery of the panic and wailing and rebellion of their predecessors 40 years previous to this. It's like they move forward with almost no hesitation. Remember the report—about the high walls? Cities impossible to penetrate? The first city they come to, Jericho, has massive, impenetrable walls—50 feet high. God tells them to do something that seems stupid; march around the walls every day for 6 days—7 times on the seventh day—and then shout. The walls simply crumble. No sledges. No battering rams. No smart bombs—nothing. And they take the city.

-A whole coalition of kings and warriors from the southern part of the land comes after them—and they summarily defeat them and take their cities and land. An entire coalition of kings and armies from the northern part of Canaan also come against them. And they defeat them.

-Forty years earlier, the spies had said, “**All** these people are huge and powerful. We felt like grasshoppers beside them—and they saw us the same way! We can't do it. We'll be slaughtered!” And it was a *lie!*

- d. Well, the whole land gets divided up between all the tribes—and it **was** a good land! The Israelites lived in houses they didn't build, ate fruit from trees they didn't plant, and harvested grain from fields they didn't plow.

-The final commentary on these monstrous people called the Anakites, the Nephilim, is almost comedic. Remember Caleb? He's this amazingly courageous, faithful guy who remained faithful when almost everyone else chickened out. Listen to what he says:

**“Now, as you can see, the LORD has kept me alive and well as he promised for all these forty-five years since Moses made this promise—even while Israel wandered in the wilderness. Today I am eighty-five years old. I am as strong now as I was when Moses sent me on that journey, and I can still travel and fight as well as I could then. So give me the hill country that the LORD promised me. You will remember that as scouts we found the descendants of Anak living there in great, walled towns. But if the LORD is with me, I will drive them out of the land, just as the LORD said.”**  
(Joshua 14:10-12 NLT)

-This area Caleb asked for was known as Kiriath-Arba—named after *Arba*—the most famous giant warrior who had ever lived. Can you read behind Caleb's words here? He's saying, “Give me the biggest, deadliest warriors, the most fortified cities and the highest walls. I've been *waiting* to go after them for 45 years! Yeah, I'm 85—but with me and the God we serve? *It's not even a*

**contest!**” And the history books tell us that he took these people out, conquered the cities—and renamed the area **Hebron**.

5. What becomes clear in this story is that the 40 years God spent with his people in the wilderness wasn't wasted time. They left Egypt—with Egypt embedded in their souls. As bad as slavery was—Egypt was their comfort zone. But through the discipline in the wilderness—they transferred their confidence to God. It was tough—but it wasn't wasted time!

-Here's the question I would like to ask: Why was that necessary? Couldn't God have worked some other way? The answer is found among the Lord's first comments to Moses:

**"How long will these people treat me with contempt? Will they *never* believe in me...? (Numbers 14:11 TNIV)**

-Apparently, to hear God's voice, to see Him crush a super-power and force it to comply, to watch Him destroy the most powerful army of that day, to see a mountain shake and smoke when the Lord touches it, to see evidence of His care and provision and guidance day after day after day after day—and then **rebel**—to absolutely **refuse** to move forward is a sign, to God, of **contempt**.

-I thought I knew what the word **contempt** means, but I looked it up anyway; and it means **disdain**. A total lack of respect or reverence.

- a. Has anyone here ever felt the contempt of another human being? It's a horrible feeling—and that level of disrespect makes you angry. Furious. Think about that. The Creator of all, magnificent, greater than **anyone** can imagine, filled with love and compassion and goodness—and yet He feels **our** contempt. In this case, God had called the Israelites to be **His People**. He had—still has a plan; He had—still has—a mission. And now **we** are His people. But to actually **be** His people—calls for our respect. Our reverence. And we **show** that with our obedience. Even when we're afraid.
- b. Think about this from God's perspective. What do you when, as the **I AM** of the universe, you've been loving and truthful and faithful and patient—when you've shown your power and love for people. But they treat you as if you're a liar and a cheat--as if you are an unreliable, scheming manipulator—who over-promises and under-delivers?

-At the core of **any** relationship—**any** form of intimacy—is **trust**. If someone proves again and again that they can't be trusted—or if someone proves again and again that they **refuse** to trust—even when someone is trust**worthy**—there is no relationship. There can't be.

-And all that's left—in a relationship with God-- is discipline. Boot camp. The hard way. Barrenness, dryness, heat, snakes and scorpions.

- c. The question I really, **really** need to ask you this morning is—**Do you trust God?** I'm not asking if you've prayed the sinner's prayer—and received the gift of life Jesus promised to those who would receive Him. I'm asking you: **Do you TRUST God.** Enough to depend on Him—even when you can't see what He's doing?

-At the core of who you are—do you believe that He's powerful, reliable, and keeps His Word? And is there evidence from your life to show that you trust **Him** more than you trust **you**? Do you believe that success and power and a life that makes a difference—comes from **Him**—or from **you**? Does He have to lay out his plan—from A to Z, with all the minor points in between—before you'll depend on Him—or can you trust that **He** knows A to Z—and will guide you one letter of the alphabet at a time?

-What do you **really** believe about God? See, to be His person, to be part of His mission on this planet—and to accomplish your mission as part of His—you'll **have** to trust Him. The alternative to trust is getting stuck; the wilderness. And He'll keep taking us back there until we're ready to follow Him. I've been there—and I don't want to ever go back!

6. The greatest enemy in following God is fear. Fear can cause you to become a nasty, angry person—who treats God and others with contempt. And our fear affects others. The fear of these 10 scouts both infected and **affected** the destinies of about 3 **million** people. Two scouts saw the **very same thing** they did—and yet said, "Be courageous! We can do this—because **God** is with us!"

-The danger the Israelites faced was **very** real. Think about it. You've left your home—and everything that is familiar. You're facing war with monstrous, renowned warriors. You're living in tents—they're living in cities with walls over 50 feet high.

-But **fear** magnifies danger. To the point that **rumors** paralyze you. Fear is a thief; it will steal your future—because, if you let it, it will keep you from being who you are **called** to be—and doing what you are **called** to do. And if you start running from your fears—you will spend your life running. When you stand at the end of your life—like Caleb at 85—what do you want to see?

- a. Fear is a kind of involuntary response that forces us to act with caution. And there **are** legitimate fears—that help you to stop and think carefully. When you're driving fast on snowy roads—the fear is legitimate. When you're putting your whole family at financial risk for a business venture—the fear is legitimate. When an 18 year old guy wants to take your 14 year old daughter on a date in his van—the fear is legitimate. When you're about to go out, wearing plaid shorts, a polka-dot shirt—and sandals with black socks—the fear of what your wife will think is legitimate!
- b. But a **lot** of the fear that keeps us back—is rumor. It's **illegitimate**. And it keeps us from being the people God has called us to be. It keeps whole churches—entire faith communities from being the people of God! From going where He calls them to go. And that means that when it comes to being a part

of God's mission to make ***all things right; to seek and find ALL who have been lost***—we'll have to choose. Faith or fear. Which will it be?

-And there is so, ***so*** much at stake. God's mission, friends, is not about us living for ourselves in a new land. The mess our world is currently in—is ***God's mission***. Us being a part of what He's up to is not about a bunch of adrenaline junkies trying to out-do each other and impress the world as God's special forces. It's ***not about us!*** It's about the love God has for us—and for the part of the world where He's placed us—and called us to live out a relationship with Him of reverence and respect.

7. I ***love*** visual created in the early chapters of Joshua—you know, when they crossed the Jordan at flood stage? The thought of this scared group of leaders who couldn't swim—wading out into the Jordan, carrying the symbol of God's presence—is amazing! How deep did they have to go before God stopped the flow upstream? To the ankles? Knees? Waist? Neck? We aren't told. But this was their ***defining moment!***

-I ***do*** know this. God always gives power along the way! See, we'd like it all up front—kinda like the ***Incredible Hulk***—clothes ripping, grunts, buttons popping, people running. But it would appear that God only gives his power to people who are ***already moving*** in the direction He's calling them.

-We are God's people. I believe that God is calling this community, The Olive Branch, into some places where we have ***never*** been. God never calls people to calm, business-as-usual, comfort zones. Comfort zones have ***never*** pushed a single person to greatness. Comfort zones spell ***death*** when it comes to courage! Rosa Parks defining moment wasn't about her ***comfort zone!***

Today, at this communion table, we take the bread—representing Jesus' broken body; we take the cup representing Jesus' shed blood, and we say, ***I'm One! I'm part of God's People—I'm one with God's people. I'm part of his mission.***

-The underlying question is—is that true or not? See, we ultimately have to decide if we will move into unknown territory where God is leading His people—or stay in our comfort zone—say the right words, eat the bread and drink the wine with everyone else--and ***fake*** it. What will it be?

-We can—and ***need*** to make that decision as a community of God's people. But, ultimately, no one else can make the decision for you. Will you step out? Will you at ***least*** stick your toes in the water and see what God does?