

Exodus: Redemption: Their Story is Our Story

On the morning of August 23, 1973, escaped convict Jan Eric Olson entered a busy bank in the center of Stockholm, Sweden. He wore a large jacket with a concealed loaded submachine gun, which he fired at the ceiling and yelled, "The party has just begun." After wounding a police officer on duty who triggered the silent alarm, Olsen took four hostages who were employees at the bank. He demanded 700,000 in Swedish currency, a getaway car, and the release of an inmate he had gotten to know during a previous stint in prison. Within hours of Olsen's demands, the police had delivered nearly all of them.

As the drama unfolded, Olsen made one extra demand. He demanded that the hostages leave with him to ensure his safe escape. But it was this demand that the authorities refused. At this point, the drama began to unfold on live television as the police tried to persuade Olsen to surrender. But for six days, Olson held the hostages inside the cramped bank vault. Over the course of those six days, something strange developed between Olson and the hostages.

During the standoff, the hostages slowly began to grow an affinity for their captor. The hostages would, on occasion, speak to the police and communicate that they were concerned about the captor's safety. They said they were not worried about being killed by Olsen, but rather, they were worried about being killed by a police assault on the building and were subsequently pleading to the police not to harm their captor. One of those working with the police during these six days was the Swedish criminologist and psychiatrist Nils Bergeron. His psychological training caused him to evaluate the situation and wonder about this strange connection that had been made. He would later name the phenomenon Stockholm Syndrome and began the term with which most of us are familiar.

Stockholm Syndrome is defined as the condition in which one grows an affinity for the one holding you captive, whether that's an abuser or, in this case, a bank robber. For those suffering from Stockholm Syndrome, there's a need for a dual liberation. Those hostages needed and were eventually let out from that bank, but they needed a deeper liberation as well. They needed healing from the trauma and the wounds that had created this syndrome.

We pick up the story in the Book of Exodus and it's right in between those two liberations. It's the moment right after that the Israelites had gone across the Red Sea, and they stand on the other side of that sea, free from 400 years of slavery, liberated in an instant. But it's at this moment that they begin that second liberation. That second salvation. The place we pick up at is after the 400 years of slavery and begins a 40-year journey where they move from the edge of the Red Sea to the promised land in Cana.

What's interesting about this 40-year journey is that most scholars agree it should have only taken them 11 days. Why 40 years? Maybe a little bit of Stockholm Syndrome? The Israelites needed a second liberation because while God had brought about their salvation instantly from the people who were enslaving them in Egypt, God needed to do a deeper liberation due to Egypt not being liberated from within them. This whole process for the rest of the Book of Exodus is about that second liberation.

God will intentionally walk them through a 40-year journey in the wilderness in order to teach them what it means to be human again. Four hundred years of slavery will deeply shape you; it will form you at a core level, causing you to question what it means to be human. The journey in which the Israelites took is exactly that journey. Because for God, the wilderness is the place of radical transformation. Hold in your mind that it's the moment in which they had just crossed over through the miraculous parting of the Red Sea. They've arrived at the other end, and now the rest of their life is in front of them. So, let's pick up Exodus 16.

The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. 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."
Exodus 16:1-3

So about a month had passed at this point. They're camped out there again. They have around a million people. It's not a small group. I imagine it takes a bit to move that amount of people. So they've been sitting there for about a month and as they're going about their journey, you can imagine the food and the store supplies that they had carried through Egypt were probably beginning to run out. You can only carry so much when you're fleeing from your captors.

As they get to the other side, they begin to grumble against Moses and Aaron. From our perspective, doesn't it seem a bit ludicrous that they look back at Egypt? For 400 years, generation after generation of their ancestors suffered in Egypt, and they were a month out of that free and liberated. They look at their leaders and they say, "If only we'd been in Egypt, it'd be better there." They talk about pots of food and having what we needed. But as we've been reading this story, we know that's only partially true.

In one sense, yes, they knew where their food was coming from. They did know where their next meal was. They knew where they were going

to lay their heads. There was, in some weird sense, a piece of safety. They understood that. But of course, we learned early on in the story that they were groaning and crying out to God because slavery is inhumane. But yet their cry to Moses and Aaron is "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt."—Stockholm Syndrome. They were looking back, longing for what was, thinking that was, in fact, the place where their healing could be. It was only the most calloused hearts and the minds that were twisted and warped that would look back on something like that and say, "If only we were still there."

Then the Lord said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. Exodus 16:4

The most ludicrous response to a ludicrous complaint is exactly what God does. He hears their whining and complaining to Moses and Aaron, and he gives them what they want. "I'll rain down bread from you." This seems ridiculous. This is the moment when your kid is whining and complaining, and you are finally just like, "I'll just give it. I'll give it right now." But I have a feeling the Lord had a better heart and intuition than I tend to when I give in to my children.

God's ludicrous response is, "You're whining; you want the food; I will rain down bread from heaven." But he gives one little caveat. He says that the people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. He was testing them to see if they would listen.

On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days" (v. 5). God gives them this bread from heaven, the sustenance in which they long for, but it would require a daily act of trust in which they were to go out, gather enough only for that day. They go out and gather for the day, and that is enough sustenance for the day.

A little bit of a side note, but if you need any convincing of the grace of God in the Old Testament, this is the text to go to. Over and over, day after day, God would rain down bread and offer them the sustenance in which they longed for. But it was a test. It was a test of both their daily trust in God and their restraint.

This was the beginning of their journey of becoming the people of God. It began with an invitation to trust just enough for today. "*So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, 'In the evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt,'"* (v. 6). Notice, by the way, this is going to be a repetition in which God and Moses and Aaron are going to remind the people who it was that brought them out of Egypt.

The importance of this is that they came from a pluralistic polytheistic community in Egypt, where many gods were believed to be active. And so God is going to continually work on reshaping them to say, "No, I am the one true God. I am the one who brought you out of Egypt. Not any other God." God wants to ensure that the first part of their return to their liberation is the reminder that it is he, Yahweh, who brought them out of Egypt.

and in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?" Moses also said, "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." Exodus 16:7-8

It almost seems like the grumbling intensifies because I love the interchange of the play on words here from the beginning of Exodus in which the people were groaning to God for liberation and they receive it and now they're grumbling to go back. There's something about that in which they're groaning, which was a healthy response, has now descended into something less than healthy.

Then Moses told Aaron, "Say to the entire Israelite community, 'Come before the Lord, for he has heard your grumbling.'" While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud. The Lord said to Moses, "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.'" That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Exodus 16:9-15a

Which, by the way, is a pretty good thing to say when you don't know what it is. I love this opening line in which it says they turned to the desert. Egypt, in some sense, is behind them. The desert or the wilderness is in front of them. And so that 40-year journey, they didn't know it was going to take 40 years, but they looked out into the desert and in this moment, they're filled with uncertainty.

They have known this life and, in some ways, they still longed for that life, but they look out onto their freedom, the liberation they have from their enslavement, and all sorts of questions, I would imagine, began to arise. What is life like now? How will I be sustained? How will the Lord take care of us? How will he shelter us? They look out onto the desert, and the glory of the Lord is there. There's something beautiful about this that as they sought and looked into the unknown, it is God's presence that is there.

We never enter into the unknown of that freedom with God and what it means to leave the world in a life we knew, alone. It's one of the beautiful messages throughout the Book of Exodus is that this cloud of God's presence, the glory, God's greatness is there out in the unknown. Certainly, it is still terrifying, still can cause anxiety, but they look out and there is God with them.

Then the story continues, and what happens is exactly what God said, bread in the morning and quail at night. There's a little subtle note that I couldn't pass up. When it says when the people look out at the bread in the morning and said, "What is it?" It is two Hebrew words. The first is "man," and the second one is "ah." So when they say, "What is it?" They say manna, which is basically them looking at the food and saying, "Huh," and then they name it that. "Let's have more, 'huh,' this morning. "What is it? I don't know. Let's just call it that tomorrow too." And that's what they did over and over again.

At this point, for the Israelites, the road would be long and arduous, but, they would not be alone on this journey. God does two things that we'll circle back to at the end that I want us to hang our hat on. First, is the daily provision. That's what we just walked through, but he also establishes in verse 17, this idea of the Sabbath, which is a weekly affirmation of who they are.

The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. And when they measured it by the omer, the one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little. Everyone had gathered just as much as they needed. Then Moses said to them, "No one is to keep any of it until morning." However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them. Each morning everyone gathered as much as they needed, and when the sun grew hot, it melted away. On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much—two omers for each person—and the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses. Exodus 16:17-22

See, there's something unique when they go out on that sixth day and gather twice as much. The reason they report it is because there's two "Huhs." There's two of them this time. And there's something miraculous about this day. So they gather twice as much. They take it before Moses.

He said to them, "This is what the Lord commanded: 'Tomorrow is to be a day of sabbath rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.'" So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. "Eat it today," Moses said, "because today is a sabbath to the Lord. You will not find any of it on the ground today. Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any." Exodus 16:23-26

Is this before or after the Ten Commandments? It's before. They will travel to Mount Sinai in chapter 19. That's in a few weeks. But right here, before the Ten Commandments, God gives this gift of the Sabbath. It is important to catch the order here because what the author is doing and what God is teaching the people is there's something about this

Sabbath that is unique. They have just left Egypt and are learning to go about the Sabbath.

The only other time the word Sabbath comes up at this point in the scriptures is in Genesis in which God worked for six days and then rested. That's the verbal form of the word Sabbath. But here in Exodus 16 is the first time the noun for Sabbath, Shabbat, shows up in the entire scriptures up to this point.

Imagine who these people are and where they are in their journey. For 400 years, their ancestors were going against the grain of the created order. Sabbath begins in Genesis when God created for six days and rested for one. That's very intentional and very important. In that moment, God built into the created order a rhythm of six and one. So when these people, who were enslaved for 400 years, worked day after day after day under harsh conditions, brick after brick for Pharaoh, they were going against the grain of the very created order in a way that slowly eroded the humanity within them.

Now, when they get to the other side of the Red Sea, God does two things. I've already mentioned the one. He gives the daily provision and then he reminds them weekly of their humanity. He says, "You are not a machine. You are not what you produce and create." They were to collect for six days and the seventh day they were to Sabbath—rest.

I would imagine, this is a bit conjecture, but it was likely the first day off for a million Israelites in their entire life. The first time they had ever rested. Imagine what that's like to get on the other side and understand there's a day in which God has provided enough for us so we don't have to work that seventh day.

There's also something unique going on in which the biblical writers know that if you're paying attention, the Sabbath hasn't shown up since Genesis 1. Remember, the plagues were the de-creation of the world. It was God undoing the created order that was built on the evil of Pharaoh. Here, when the Sabbath is reconstituted, it's God's way of creating a new world. You hear "beginning again," the de-creation that took place through the plagues has now given way to the recreation of a world and people, and God is dwelling with them daily with this weekly affirmation of who they are.

The concept of Sabbath is a beautiful gift. It is revolutionary in human history. We tend to think of it as a bit more normal. We have a weekend, which is generally about two days off a week. That's a real gift that we in our society try to obtain. Most of us have a hard time taking two days off, but nonetheless, we forget that this idea of a day off, a Sabbath day of rest to the Lord, is revolutionary in the history of world.

This is the first God who would do this daily provision mixed with weekly trust. That's the rhythm God invites the people into as they learn what it means to be human again. And I believe it's the same invitation before us. But there's a question that hangs over this whole narrative. Why is God going about it in this way? Which the why question is always good for us to bring back to the text, because a few things happen.

You see the miraculous work of God all through Exodus, through the plagues, through the crossing of the Red Sea, and through the

appearance of bread and manna. One of the interesting thoughts I heard from a pastor this week was why couldn't God just place the manna in the stomach of the people? There's certainly something to the trust, but he made it appear on the ground. Why couldn't he just put it inside their stomachs? Or why couldn't he just scoop them up and place them in the promised land? Why couldn't the land on the other side of the Red Sea simply be the promised land? Why couldn't they just get there, and that be the place of freedom? What is God up to in this 40-year journey in the desert? Couldn't there be an easier way? Certainly, God was capable of it.

Before we get too far down that road, I want to turn to Deuteronomy 8. Deuteronomy is a great book to read alongside the Book of Exodus because it's a book in which Moses is now retelling the story of Exodus, but he's reading it to the next generation. The generation that we're reading about right now in Exodus will not be allowed to go into the promised land. They will all die off, and part of that's because of this 40-year journey where they were disobedient. That's not one of the only times they grumbled. God eventually tells them they are not allowed into that promised land, but rather the next generation will.

Deuteronomy is Moses retelling the story of Exodus to the next generation, because as you pass it on to that next generation, there's a tendency to lose the story, particularly the origin story of who you are. One of the major themes of Exodus is God reminding the people who he is. So, Deuteronomy is the retelling to the next generation. It's here that we get God's reasoning as to why this journey is in the wilderness.

Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors. Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Deuteronomy 8:1-3

Why does God lead them 40 years through the desert, through the wilderness? To humble them, test them, and teach them that they do not live alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. The journey of the wilderness is a journey in which God is taking an enslaved people who were formed by the dynamics of Egypt and only understood life either in that broken condition or through the lens of those in power in Egypt. God needed to re-architect the internal piece of their life, or put differently as has been said, the Israelites were out of Egypt, but Egypt was not out of the Israelites. God took those 40 years and worked in them a new way to understand what it means to be human.

This story that we see of the Israelites is a historical thing that took place, but yet the beauty of it is that it's an archetype for your life and my life in Christ. It's the same journey. We, too, need two liberations.

There's a moment in which we come to the instant saving work of Jesus. That happens in an instant. But just like the Israelites needed Egypt out of them, we, too, need to work the Egypt out of our lives. We, too, need to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, as Paul said in the New Testament.

We're saved in an instant, and this is the gracious move of God. But what they will spend the rest of their lives, and you and I will spend the rest of our lives doing, is learning to live from that identity. The metaphor that we see here in Exodus is that the way of the wilderness is the way of freedom and formation. You have to be formed into the person who lives free in Christ. It will require us to partner with God in that slow counter-formation. Because whether you can resonate with this story or not, the reality is we have all been shaped by the world around us in ways that tend to push us away from the way of Jesus. There are dynamics about this.

Paul would talk about the present age. He said that the present age is dying off, and this new age of the kingdom of God is now here. It's becoming more and more the reality of all creation, and we live in this overlap. We're here in the middle of the present age that's dying away, and the kingdom of God that is here. For us, we cross over by the miraculous work of Jesus in which we're instantly liberated from the present age, but we have to spend our lifetime learning to live in light of the beautiful reality of the freedom in Christ.

This is simpler than I'm making it. Are you ever pulled back to the sins that you were forgiven of? Have you ever felt the tug to turn around and think that it was a little bit better in Egypt. At least there you got what you wanted. You could do anything you wanted. Even the whole while you knew you were enslaved by that very thing.

Have we not been the Israelites? Groaning for salvation, the act of God comes in, and yet we still grumble. This whole love your enemy thing is too hard. It's easier if I could just hate them. I just want to go back to the way Egypt functions. That seemed easier. It's easier to just satisfy every desire and pleasure that comes to my mind. That was a lot easier, even though you were enslaved by it. There's no freedom in that.

All of us have this tendency, this pull toward the present age that's dying away. And the invitation of God is that there's a different way to be human, an altogether different reality. He wants us to learn to live in light of that. "Follow me into that new reality." The truth is, if you build your life or identity on anything other than God or something that you believe is more than God, it will enslave you.

The formation to the world could be success. It could be moralism. It could be power. It could be fame. It could be apathy. It could be pleasure. Any of those things are the dynamics in which the present age operates. It's the way they order reality. It's the way they project the good life, and all of us are caught up in some vision of the good life. Is your vision of the good life more shaped by Jesus in the kingdom of God or by Egypt? Because both of those things will communicate: Here's what it means to be successful and to live the good life.

As the story of scriptures communicates over and over, if it's anything less than God, it will enslave you. It will become your master, and you will have to chase after it continually. It's in Ecclesiastes when the writer says that God has placed eternity in the heart of men, which means that for all of us, we have this eternity. We are built for something beyond this world. This world is bound by time. Eternity doesn't make sense in this world, but God says there's something about being human that has eternity placed in the heart of all humankind. C.S. Lewis would say, therefore wouldn't that seem to point to something beyond this reality that will actually satisfy it.

At any point, if you try to satisfy that eternal longing with something that is finite, you will become enslaved to it. If success is your idol and your vision of the good life, there is always another promotion. There is always a greater position, authority, or power. There's always more money to be made. There's always another digit in your 401k. There is always more success. There's always more power to be garnered.

But what would it look like to understand your value, not based on the dynamics of Egypt, but based on the kingdom of God that says you have been given eternity in your hearts and that the eternal God is welcoming you with open arms? Could it be that this is the good life? Could it be that this is what your heart longs for?

I want to talk about how it is that this wilderness journey, this place of freedom and formation, actually plays itself out in the lives of both the people of God and us as disciples. I want to do so by talking about three elements of it. First, the place of our formation. Second, the process of our formation, and third, the provision in our formation.

Place Of Our Formation

First, the place of our formation. Now, notice that this happens in the desert or the wilderness. We've talked a lot about that. It's the same concept. This idea of the desert or the wilderness is an archetype that you'll see over and over in the biblical story. Think about the times in which Jesus would escape to the lonely place, the desert, the wilderness. It was one of Jesus' favorite places. He would escape out into the wilderness in order to be with God.

So, what is unique about the desert or the wilderness? The wilderness or desert is a place where life isn't easily sustained. Life is difficult in the desert. There's naturally, particularly for us when we go into the desert, a deep dependence on something other than ourselves in order to be sustained. They had just crossed the Red Sea, and they were led by the presence of God into this difficult place. It is not this anomaly in which they found themselves in the wilderness, but rather God intentionally walked them into the desert.

It's the same logic in the New Testament when it says that the Spirit of God led Jesus into the wilderness. There's something intentional about this. And here's where it's important for us. This isn't to say that every hardship or hard season of life you have has been orchestrated by God.

If that's a hard concept, I understand. I call you back to the series in Job where we wrestled with the question of what does it mean when we suffer? But I am confident in saying that God will use every season. And

at times God does lead you into the wilderness, because here's the truth of it, the desert is a place of disorientation, but it's the disorientation that we desperately need.

They had grown familiar with life in Egypt. The subtle nature of sin is that we get comfortable with it. It's a way in which life just makes sense. I get it, and it slowly dulls our senses. We slowly, over time, become enslaved to it without realizing what it's doing. But in the desert, you're stripped away of all of that. This is hard for us in the modern world because we're deeply formed by our ability to cultivate comfort.

We've been in our house in Millbrae for about a year now. I remember the last time we did our walkthrough before we started moving boxes in, we were down in the backyard, and we had missed it somehow, but we turned a corner, and there, right next to the house, was this box. I look at it, and I say, "Is that an air conditioning compressor?" It was! Some of you may have air conditioning, but you only need to maybe twice a year in the Bay area. I won't tell you exactly how much my PG&E bill was last month, but I'll confirm that I do like some comfort.

We like comfort. We're used to comfort. We're familiar with comfort. We have the means and the ability to create it, but oftentimes, God intentionally leads us into a place of discomfort because it's how it exposes what is within us. Growth happens when we're led in places of discomfort. All growth must move from comfort to discomfort. Listen to the way Ruth Haley Barton in her great book, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, which is essentially a breakdown of *Moses* as a leader. She talks specifically about this wilderness experience and what comes of it in the way of silence and solitude.

When we are stripped of external distraction in solitude, we inevitably become more aware of false patterns of thinking and being and doing that usually lurks unnoticed under the surface of the busyness of our lives. Barton

This is why a practice of silence and solitude is so hard for us. Because once you get into that place and sit quietly before the Lord, everything rushes to the surface. Our tendency is to pull our phones back out, distract ourselves, and rush off to this or that. Is that any different than missing the pots of meat and missing Egypt?

In the place of the desert, when all of that is exposed, that's exactly what God wants to do. He brings all of that to the surface, not to shame us, but to heal us from the wounds that shape that within us. So, the first is the place of our formation.

The Process of Our Formation

It's one thing to have all of that come to the surface, all of that rise up and be exposed, the false ways of thinking, being, and doing. But second, in the desert, there's a process of formation. You're in the wilderness, and when those things surface, the way toward healing is actually to begin dealing with those aspects of your life. But that will require what Jesus says, a taking up of your cross. It'll be a thousand little crucifixions in which you bring the old self to light. You realize that part of us has been more shaped by Egypt, and it must die so that the resurrection of new life can happen within us.

The process of our formation is to suffer over and over again, often-times, in small ways, in subtle ways. I haven't read a lot of memoirs in my life, but I'm increasingly being taken by that genre. And one of the common themes is that it was times of suffering that caused people to grow the most. When you ask someone how did they become who they are, they don't say "It was a Tuesday, I had a great day, and everything was fine." It tends to be times of suffering. The time when they lost their job. It was the time when their spouse received that diagnosis. It was the time in which their whole world seemed to be falling apart. It was the time when their sin was exposed and laid bare before people.

It was those times in which they grew the most. Suffering is the engine of growth. It's the engine of how we mature and grow over time. But I worry about my own life in this, and others as well, because most of us design our lives to avoid suffering. It's through suffering that God does his deepest formative work. He may or may not have caused it, but I guarantee you he'll use it.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, that great German theologian, once said in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." Formation happens through a series of long, little deaths in which we kill off the parts of our own life that are organized and formed toward the Egypt of our own day. We allow something new to come into its place. And suffering, at whatever level, is the substance that God can use in order to shape and forge our character. It's all those little deaths in which God is inviting us into something new.

For 40 years, the people were in the wilderness. They were experiencing this small reorientation as to who they were. The formation of the soul is slow, difficult, and often painful work. But don't forget the cloud is out there in the desert. You're not alone. And that leads to the third point. It's not just the place of our formation. It's not just the process.

The Provision in our Formation

It's also the provision in our formation daily. They were invited go out and gather enough for today. Everyone who gathered a lot had just enough. Those who gathered a too small had enough. On the sixth day they gathered two of them, and that was enough to remind them of that weekly reconstitution of who they were as a human. It was goodness.

The provision in the wilderness, the provision in our formation, is daily you are given sustenance and weekly at the Sabbath you're reminded that you are no longer a slave to daily and weekly rhythms. Over the course of decades, slowly there is that second liberation within the people of God in which they enter in to a new life.

Most of us, because we're shaped by the modern world, have this idea that God can just heal our character in an instant. We live in a technique-based world. Give me a pill, give me a formula, give me an app, and that will change me. But all of us know, at our core, that's not how

character is formed. If we're to become shaped into the Christlike character of Jesus, it will take decades, not moments.

Most of us have become addicted to, in our relationship with the Lord, the Red Sea moments and the plagues. We get addicted to the emotional high that is very beautiful. God uses those moments, but we forget the 40 years of monotony of manna after manna, daily provision over and over.

A few weeks ago, I had the chance to present at an event alongside Rich Villodas, an author and a pastor, and he asked a question that stuck with me. He said, "Do I worship God, or do I worship my experience of God?" It's a penetrating question because I have a feeling that most of us, like the Israelites, are in love and worshiping the Red Sea moments. What a moment! But that moment could not sustain them for 40 years. They needed the daily monotony. They needed the boring act of gathering manna coming before the Lord, day after day. It's that act of trust, the daily and weekly rhythms of grace in which they were formed into a new people.

But hear me, it took 40 years. You are not following Jesus and figuring it out in a week. You will spend the rest of your life working out the different aspects of your heart that have been shaped by Egypt, but the provision is there. So my hope is that as we mature, as I mature in following Jesus, I mature past those mountaintop and Red Sea experiences. Not that they're bad. Again, they'll have another one at Mount Sinai. God uses those moments. But any relationship will understand that the relationship is matured less in the weddings and the big moments and more in the monotonous days in and days out. How are you committing faithfully to trust the other? The same is true with our relationship with the Lord.

The way of the wilderness is the way of freedom and formation if we allow it to do its work within us. All of these challenges were placed on the people as a willingness to trust them. I was reminded this morning of that prayer from the French priest, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, in which he said, "Above all, trust in the slow work of God." I imagine there were moments in which the Israelites we're questioning, we're doubting, and would continue to look back to Egypt, but freedom is not found there. Rather, could they trust in the slow work of God that was bringing about the freedom they could never imagine?

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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Catalog No.1484-9FC