

Exodus

Sermon #12: Move Out!

Numbers 11

Dr. Matt Cassidy---- November 3, 2024

Wow, there's a lot going on here at Grace Covenant Church! What a great Sunday to be here, with the Mobilization Fair and all the opportunities in front of us. They go right along with our teaching time.

If you'll go to Numbers chapter 11, I'll meet you there. Numbers is the fourth book in the Bible—Numbers chapter 11. Here is one of our core values, one of the slabs that we poured the church on and why we started in the first place over fifty years ago. We've made it into a saying, and it goes like this: I'm just a pastor, but you're the ministers. One of the reasons the church started was because it clearly says in the Bible that all believers are priests, we're all doing ministry.

And today we're going to look at how, as ministers, there are costs involved in ministry. I love this church so much. We're buying Christmas gifts for children we don't even know. Many of you make meals for friends of friends. Some of you are sending money to missionaries you've never met. You get involved with helping with a funeral on Tuesday when you're not feeling well, but you'll come and help anyway. You look for opportunities to pray and care and share the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's a great church. Every believer is a minister. Go to our website—there's a place you can go—it says, *What are your spiritual gifts?* It's talking about your supernatural spiritual gifts and how you're using those gifts to be involved in something so much bigger than yourself, giving pleasure to God, and bringing you right here, right now, for this very purpose.

Today we're going to look at the life of Moses and the costs and dangers of being involved in ministry. This is kind of a ministry training day for us. And one of the reasons I think this passage in chapter 11 is so important for us is to help us understand that there are costs associated with doing ministry. And I don't want you to be surprised, in some respects. You could walk away saying, *Hey, if it happened to Moses, it could happen to me.*

Or, as one writer said—I like this quote—“If you’re going to be the light of the world, you could expect to attract some bugs.”

Israel’s Exit from Egypt Hits One-Year Mark

So, here’s where our story is. We’re studying the event of the Exodus together, and we’ve already finished the Book of Exodus, and we’re in Numbers at this point. In Numbers we find that Israel is now a nation all to itself. They are God’s people. And not only that, they’re celebrating one year out of Egypt. So, they’re going to have a celebratory Passover for the first time outside of Egypt. They have spent most of the year at Mt. Sinai where they learned how to live a life that gives honor and glory to God.

But know this about Numbers—I mean, it’s called Numbers for a reason. In chapter 1, they number all the men twenty years and older. Hmmm ... just like we do, numbering all the men eighteen years and older. It’s a military draft. The Book of Numbers is about the military. In chapters 2 through 10 they’re learning how to camp in formation and how to march in formation. There are a couple of pictures from some study Bibles about how they are told in Numbers how to set up camp. Look—that is a military camp. The last two sentences in chapter 10, right before we get to our chapter, are marching orders. This is how Moses says, “Move out!”

Number 10:35-36

Whenever the ark set out, Moses said, “Rise up, O LORD! May your enemies be scattered; may Your foes flee before You.”³⁶ Whenever it came to rest, he said, “Return, O LORD, to the countless thousands of Israel.”

“Whenever the ark set out, Moses would say, ‘Rise up, O Lord! May Your enemies be scattered; may your foes flee before You.’”

And then when it’s time to all stop, Moses says this. “Whenever it came to rest, he said, ‘Return, O Lord, to the countless thousands of Israel.’”

So, turn the page to chapter 11. Finally, here we go. It has been called the Promised Land for 500 to 1,000 years, and now we get to go. Now we’re heading out. Now we are moving out, everybody! Chapter 11.

A Rebellion

So, they march for three days, seventy-two hours, and there's already a significant mutiny taking place, a rebellion. And listen, you know the storyline. This isn't like the previous time when they were three days outside the Red Sea and they didn't have any good water and they complained, and God didn't punish them—He just made the water sweet. Ten days or two weeks after leaving the Red Sea, they were looking for food and complained, and the Lord didn't get angry. He provided them manna. They were new. They were learning. God knows that there's a learning curve involved when you're living by faith, that there's growth involved.

This is not that. This is one year later with every day being an experience of consistent dependence on the Lord. Twelve months of God's faithfully providing for them—this is different now.

Numbers 11:4-6

The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, “If only we had meat to eat! ⁵ We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. ⁶ But now our soul is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at!”

Let me say it differently: boot camp's over. And this is treason. And it has to be dealt with. Moses prays, and the wrath of God is held back in the first insurrection. And then another insurrection takes place in verse 4, and it's about food. It says this: “The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, ‘If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onion and garlic. But now our soul is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at!’”

I'll tell you again, these are not vacationers complaining to management about bland food. This is an army in rebellion over a menu. It's just a menu item.

See how the paradigm changed things? Sometimes when you're doing ministry, you have to say to someone who maybe misunderstands the purpose of church, “This is not a spa. This is like one of those extreme gyms trying to get you in shape. You don't come to church to get

pampered. You come to church to become like Christ in all your life. And sometimes it's hugs, and sometimes it's work."

Ingratitude has no place amongst the people of God. Envy is the poison that contaminates the soul. These malcontents are an infectious disease. That's what is happening here. Ingratitude is like an illness that keeps you from fully experiencing life right here and right now. It makes it so that you're incapable of rejoicing for your current circumstances. Ingratitude is the condition of the heart that keeps playing, "If only ... if only back then ... if only I was over there ... if only the future were here now." And this ingratitude is saying the right here and the right now that God has provided is not enough.

Know that this craving of other foods is no small problem. It must be dealt with. It's an addiction. It can't be quenched. Whatever you give this group of people, they're going to want more.

Today, certainly one of the themes is that ingratitude is an exceedingly costly sin. Being malcontent is going to issue bills that you cannot afford to pay. And you're going to see that here. In just this story, I counted four costs for this sin.

The first one is that it twisted the souls of those who were complaining. Dorothy Sayers wrote about the definition of sin as a deep interior dislocation of the soul. Sin has a power. It's not passive—it has a power. And it corrupts every single thing it touches.

Let me say it in a different way. Sin has a self-destructive capability to destroy whatever the means of the sin is. Let me give you some examples. If you sin with your mind, it cannibalizes reason. If you sin with your emotions and feelings, it causes you to go numb and stop feeling. If you sin with your will, it causes you to lose willpower and discipline.

And in this case here, this passage, you're going to see ingratitude and envy absolutely terrorize the souls of those participants completely—intellectually, emotionally, and volitionally.

Intellectually—what do they say? "We had it so great in Egypt." And what do they say—"at no cost." This is way beyond romanticizing the past. This is unreasonable. They can't reason. They have reinvented their history. *You were slaves! Family members were beat to death! Whatever happened to Jacob, Jr? Oh, that's right—the Egyptians drowned him in the Nile River. At no cost?* They can't think. Sin has devoured their reason.

Their emotions—it says "craving"—it means "lusting." It's a compulsive desire for something. Their emotions are for vegetables. They're doing this for vegetables. I mean, really

... that's like craving beets. Leeks and onions ... they didn't even direct it towards the right thing.

And then the will—volitional—if you look at your Bibles, look at three or four different translations for verse 6. I like the translation that says, “Our souls dried up.” It's the word *nephesh* in Hebrew. It means “soul.” But it can mean “our strength has dried up.” So, even in the act of their will, *We can't even choose to do things. We need this other meal plan.*

So, the first cost of this ingratitude is towards the souls of the people who are complaining. And the second one is that it's going to destroy the mission. It's going to destroy the cause of God here.

By the way, look at how contagious the nature of grumbling is. Know that it starts with “the rabble” with them. And the rabble is like a word that describes the people that are on this journey that aren't Israelites. These are the Egyptians or other foreigners that were in Egypt at the time and were living through the ten plagues, thinking, *We've got to get out of here. We're leaving before Egypt burns to the ground.* And so, these are outsiders, those who don't know God or who have no history with God in their culture. And they start it. But look at what it says: “The rabble with them were the ones craving other foods, and now Israel steps in, and then Israel started wailing.” They're taking their lines from these outsiders. It's spreading like wildfire, because this ingratitude is contagious. The safety and the success of the mission from God is going to be lost here if something isn't done soon, right away. These ingrates—this is mutiny.

There's been a very recent management survey on this cancer. The one I read said, “Nothing tears up teams more thoroughly and quickly than constant complainers.” Infectious disease—you lose your purpose. It'll wreck and spilt a business, a sports team, a family, a military unit, a church. You lose your way.

And so, the cost of ingratitude is on the souls of the people who are ungrateful; you lose your mission. This hurts—it injures the very heart of God.

When these people are complaining, they are essentially saying that God cannot be trusted. The Lord is not out for our good. Look at the logic like it's math. The envy and the coveting—those who are not content are saying this: *If you trust God completely, your soul will dry up—just like that. If you do this, you're going to get that. If you live in a way that we have nothing in our lives except what God provided, then life is terrible. If you fully surrender to God and do the Ten Commandments, if you go to church and abstain from any kind of sex outside of*

marriage, if you give generously, if you confess your sins, your life will be unlivable. Your soul will dry up. Your strength will leave you.

See how this is an assault on God's very goodness? And that's why God takes this quite personally. Every time we say something like, *I know what the Bible says... I should do this ... but I won't.* Or ... *I shouldn't do that ... but I will.* When we live outside the boundaries of God, we are saying to God, *I can't live a happy life if it's just going to be within what You allow.* I can't trust in Your goodness, that that will be enough. It's an assault on God and His very nature.

The source of it is the devil. It's been around since the Garden of Eden.

Here's a tragic truth in this storyline. Think about this fact. When does Israel get a new menu? Let me say it a different way. Where does Israel get a new menu? In the Promised Land. After all, it's called the land flowing with milk and honey. (That's better than beets.) If they would just trust God and get there, they'd have their new menu. Brace yourself—it takes eleven days to get from Mt. Sinai to the spy outpost to stare into this land of milk and honey called Kadish Barnea—eleven days. They are three days into the eleven-day journey. They would look at the menu and see all that was available for them in less than two weeks. By the end of the month, they would be up there smelling the barbeque if they could just get there --- and they don't. They are so close. They are like when you see some kind of sprinter trip at the finish line because they got cocky. Or somebody runs the football back and they spike the ball on the five-yard line. You think, *Wow!*

Let these losers be a lesson to all of us. We could be less than eleven days from receiving all that God in store for us—His dream for our life. Do not grow weary in doing good. For if you endure, at the right time you will harvest righteousness. If you become a malcontent, you risk it all. You could lose it all, right before it was all promised. There's a high cost to ingratitude. It's costing the complainers their souls, it's ending the mission, it's grieving God.

And finally, we see here, it's burning up Moses. I'm just a pastor, you guys are the ... ministers. Yeah, listen carefully. You might have said some of the things that Moses is saying. It's not uncommon for people to feel this way when they're involved in ministry and they start burning out. There are some lessons to learn here. Just ask yourself if you've ever done this or felt this.

Two Clues That You're Experiencing Ministry Burnout

1. Like Moses, you think it is up to you to do God's job

Numbers 11:10-13

Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the entrance to his tent. The LORD became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled. ¹¹ He asked the LORD, "Why have You brought this trouble on Your servant? What have I done to displease You that You put the burden of all these people on me? ¹² Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do You tell me to carry them in arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land You promised on oath to their forefathers? ¹³ Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, 'Give us meat to eat!'¹⁴ I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me."

There are two clues to know if you're burning up. The first one is, Moses here thinks it's up to him to do God's job. Listen to this prayer and how much of it is focused on Moses and his taking responsibility for things that aren't his. Verses 10 through 15: "Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the entrance to his tent. And the Lord became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled. He asked the Lord, 'Why have you brought this trouble upon Your servant? What have I done to displease You that You would put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do You tell me to carry them in arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land You promised on oath to their forefathers? Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, "Give us meat to eat!" I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me.'"

Moses ... whoa ... whoa. No, you didn't give birth to this nation, and you're not supposed to be carrying them like a nurse carries a baby. And you never made promises, so it's not up to you to fulfill them. God made the promises, God will make the promises happen.

Exodus 11:15

“If this is how You are going to treat me, put me to death right now—if I have found favor in Your eyes—and do not let me face my own ruin.”

“I cannot carry all these people by myself. The burden is too heavy for me.” It goes on in verse 15: “If this is how you’re going to treat me, put me to death right now—if I have found favor in Your eyes—and do not let me face my own ruin.”

He is over the edge. He’s being crushed because he’s carrying the world on his shoulders. He wasn’t meant to carry the world on his shoulders. He’s just meant to carry the people in his heart. He’s doing things only God is supposed to be doing. That happens when you do ministry.

2. Like Moses, you think the job is too big for God

The second sign that you’re burning out is shown in how Moses thinks the job is too big for God. Moses thinks the job is too big for God. And you can see how they’re kind of related to each other. *I’m going to do what God is supposed to be doing, because He can’t do it, or He won’t do it. So, I’m taking it up.* That’s maybe how the logic works. *Since He can’t do it or He won’t do it, I guess I’ll have to do it.*

So, what happens is God says, *Moses, I’m going to give them enough quail for a month. It’s going to be coming out of their noses. They’re going to overdose on this quail.*

Numbers 11:21-23

But Moses said, “Here I am among six hundred thousand men on foot, and You say, ‘I will give them meat to eat for a whole month!’²² Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for them? Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them?”

²³ The LORD answered Moses, “Is the LORD’s arm too short? You will now see whether or not what I say will come true for you.”

And Moses’ response is this: “But Moses said, ‘Here I am among six hundred thousand men on foot, and You say, “I will give them meat to eat for a whole month!” Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for them? Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them?’” It can’t happen.

“The Lord answered Moses, ‘Is the Lord’s arm too short? You will now see whether or not what I say will come true for you.’”

That’s a pretty good sign of burnout, when you’re telling the Lord that He can’t do it.

Here’s a quote—it’s not a quote, it’s a sentence I made up—a quote from Matt Cassidy. “Burnout is when you try to do what only God can do because you think God can’t do it.” And that’s how it happens.

Let me apply this. This is how I think God works sometimes. Sometimes I think the purpose of the ministry that God involves us in is to put us in a place, put us in a circumstance, where we are overwhelmed and start asking, *Is God’s arm too short for this?* In other words, God is putting us in a place of continual and progressive faith-growing circumstances so that we’re thinking, *God, what are You going to do? And can You do this? Is Your arm long enough? Can You reach what I need?*

I’ve got a dozen stories from Melinda’s life. (Oops ... I’m going to use a few as an illustration, honey.) When our kids were younger, they were in public schools because we didn’t want them to have any advantages. So, particularly when our girls were in junior high, they were

part of a ministry that one of the ladies here at Grace started. It was a Bible study on campus about what a girl's self-image should be based on. Their identity should be in the Lord.

And every year that Melinda was involved in this ministry at our junior high school there were problems. And the problems kept getting worse. There were not just problems, but opposition. And for every opposition there was a "Lord, are Your arms long enough for this?" I mean, now the principal is mad. And every year the Lord showed up with long arms.

We couldn't have the ministry blast, the great stories of ministry involvement, and growth in our walk with God, if He hadn't put us in ministry that was way beyond our ability to do ourselves. God is intentionally putting you in ministry situations that are above and beyond your abilities, so that—not to burn you out—you will call out desperately for His help and have a God story where He reaches in and fixes it. Faith is growing, which means increasing in difficulty.

What Does Moses Do?

I'd like to look now at what Moses did. We're going to look at what Moses did and who Moses is--what Moses did as a minister so that we can learn from him in the context of a mutiny taking place and burning out.

Here's what Moses did. He does two things that we can learn from. One, he prays. And two, he waits.

1. He Prays

Numbers 11:2

When the people cried out to Moses, he prayed to the LORD and the fire died down.

He prays. In the first rebellion, the Lord steps in and starts killing the mutineers, and Moses prays for them. "When the people cried out to Moses, he prayed to the Lord and the fire died down." He prayed.

And then he prayed for himself. We just read that prayer for himself. It was rather pitiful, but it was honest. He says, *I can't take this anymore*. And the point is, as you guys are ministers—we're all ministers together—let me tell you, if you're involved in ministry, you need to pray. You need to pray a lot. The more you involve yourself in caring for the neighbors or caring for your coworkers, being involved in whatever the Lord has you do, depending on your spiritual gift and how you're going to use it, you're going to need to take those people's names to the Lord. You can't change someone else's heart. Only God can.

And so, one of the better consequences of doing ministry regularly is that you find your prayer life gets upgraded, because it's necessary. You constantly find yourself saying, *God, you've got to get in here. You've got to change this person's life, cause something to happen so we can step in. Help us.*

2. He Waited on God

The second thing he did was he waited on God. He waited on God to help him with his burnout.

They just finished a three-year study on people who burn out in corporate America. And it's interesting, the first conclusion they came to was that they defined it differently than they were expecting. Burnout is the curse of the strong, not the weak. It's the curse of the strong. People who burned out had the tendency, consistently, to like to do it all themselves, because it's easier than delegating. So, they do too many things themselves, like Moses.

The other thing is that they don't share the burden with others because they don't want to burden other people. So, it's a curse of the strong. And the antidote for burnout is to share the load. They just finished this three-year study and that's what they came up with.

What Does God Do?

1. God Sends Help

This is what happens in Moses' life. He waits on the Lord, and what the Lord does is to say, *Moses, tell people we need seventy elders representing the twelve tribes who are famous and*

known for their leadership skills. And then have everybody meet at the Tent of Meeting. And then at the Tent of Meeting in front of everyone the Lord gave those seventy men the same Holy Spirit that was on Moses.

Numbers 11:17

“They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone.”

And here’s what it says: “They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone.”

This is such a kind act of God’s love for Moses. *You don’t have to do this by yourself. Here are seventy men, and I want everyone else to see who they are. And now you don’t have to do this the way you’re doing it now.*

2. God Provides Discipline

He waited not just for help, but he also waited for God’s justice. He doesn’t scream at the people. He screams at God about the people. What ends up happening is that God says, *Look, I’m going to give them more quail than they know what to do with, till it’s coming out of their nose.*

And then the wind shifts because of the Lord’s work, and this cloud of quail comes. You could see quail hovering about three feet high as far as you could see in every direction. And then it said that the people craved. They were gluttonous. It says that they were picking up these quail all day, all night, and all the next day. Everyone had way too much quail. And then they started gorging themselves on it in an ironic act of the way things work with judgment. While it’s still in their teeth, they choke on the quail. And some people die.

And enough people die so that they stop everything, and they dig a lot of holes in the ground, and they bury them there. And they name this campsite “Graves for the Craving.”

Moses realizes that God is listening. And he’s watching. And no one is getting away with insulting God or Moses.

Who Moses Was

Who is this Moses, that he could pray for and care for the people who persecuted him? That he was out for the best interests of those who wanted to ruin him? Who is Moses and what does he have?

Numbers 12:3

(Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)

In chapter 12 it says what he has. In Numbers 12:3 it's an interesting sentence in the Bible. "(Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)" This defining attribute is not his talent, not his intelligence, not his opportunities or leadership skills. He is humble. Moses is humble, and that's what gives him the ability to be a godly leader.

Listen, it didn't start that way. How did he become humble? He wasn't born into it. If you remember the early parts of the story of Moses, he was a very proud and angry man. What does it? He's involved in ministry. And when you're involved in ministry, you get humbled. It's another great attribute of being a minister amongst you. When you're involved in ministry, you will be humbled.

And while you're in that moment of being humbled, there's a fork in the road. And you can turn into a grumbler, or you can turn into someone who's humble. You can say, *Do you know who I am? And I don't need this in my life.* Or you can turn and say, *What part of the pride in my life is this rubbing raw?* You have to choose.

Ministry gives us the potential of the magic of becoming humble. What's interesting in this story here is that the ministry of life change in this storyline is that the people don't change; Moses does. And when you're involved in ministry, ministry is the means to change our lives and to make us like Christ in all of life. I'm not sure there's a faster way to become humble than being involved in ministry and serving one another. When you're doing scary things for the glory of God and you'll go anywhere, anytime, anyplace, to help anyone, you're going to end up with

crazy, great God stories. And many of those God stories are going to be about life change in your life. There will be a time when you're going to say, *Why is all of this on me? Do you know who I am? I don't need this in my life.* And then the Spirit of God will say, *Moses, that's not a Christ-like attitude.*

You have ministry stories where you're going to be put in a situation where you're going to try and start a Bible study at work or at school, or some kind of big ministry hurdle. And you'll say, *God, is Your arm too short for this?* And God will show up and you'll have a ministry story. But you only have a ministry story if you're doing ministry.

And I'll say this about ministry as well. The worship after ministry victories—there is nothing like that. Because you got to see God do a miracle through you. You were willing to step out and do something scary and He came in to save you. That's great worship.

So, God, I'm just a pastor. You guys are the ministers.

I wanted to share with you a passage in Numbers 11 to let you know what burnout looks like. You don't have to go there. You don't have to do what only God can do. You need to trust that He will do it, because He can do it. I just wanted to remind you of that. I wanted to tell you that the greatest ministry in your life will take place in your acts of humility. Sometimes becoming humble means being humble. And you can look for those opportunities.

I want you to see in this passage that there is a high cost to doing ministry. I mean, look at the toll on Moses. And I came here to tell you, pay it. Whatever the cost of ministry is, pay it. It's worth everything. You were created to do good works in Jesus Christ, and those good works were arranged before time began. What is your spiritual gift and how are you using it for the glory of God? Because that's where He'll meet you. He's going to meet you during His ministry purposes. You find out where He's working, and you go there and use those supernatural spiritual gifts for His glory. It's going to cost you. But it will cost you a lot more if you don't.

And that concludes our ministry training for the day.

[Prayer]

Lord Jesus, we are grateful. We are grateful that You would include us in Your expansion of Your kingdom, and that You would let us play these petty parts so that we could just spend time with You.

Lord, we celebrate that You won't leave us weak and shy and scared, but that you'll progressively put us into circumstances and in situations where we're afraid and having to trust You and wait. What a life.

Lord, I'd ask that You would continue to give us great ministry stories and that Grace would continue to be famous for being ministers. We pray this in Jesus' name. And Grace Covenant Church said, Amen.