

Grumble, Grumble, Grumble, Provide?

Exodus 16:2-20 (NIV)

² In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. ³ 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." ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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." ⁶ 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, ⁷ 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?" ⁸ 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." ⁹ Then Moses told Aaron, "Say to the entire Israelite community, 'Come before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.'" ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ The LORD said to Moses, ¹² "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.'" ¹³ That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴ When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. ¹⁵ When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat. ¹⁶ This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Everyone is to gather as much as they need. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.'" ¹⁷ The Israelites did as they were told: some gathered much, some little. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ Then Moses said to them, "No one is to keep any of it until morning." ²⁰ 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.

Do you know what onomatopoeia is? Yeah, it's one of those fun words you say to sound super intellectual. Actually, it's something you probably learned in English class about words formed from a sound associated with what it is named. What do you call the sound a bee makes when flying? It's a buzz, because it sounds like a buzz. The sound of a hamburger patty hitting the grill sounds like a sizzle. A slap sounds like a slap. A flutter sounds like a flutter. A grumble sounds like a grumble. That's onomatopoeia.

Grumbling is what was heard in the desert after the Israelites left Egypt. It had only been a month, but the Israelites were already running out of supplies. And no wonder since you are talking about a community, a nation, of a million or more people walking through a desert region. They had already had to deal with a water shortage. Now the food was gone. The Israelites grumbled, "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." (verses 2-3) Grumble. Grumble. Grumble. It was so much better in Egypt. Grumble. Grumble. Grumble. We had all the food we wanted – pots of meat! Grumble. Grumble. Grumble. You brought us out here to die! Grumble. Grumble. Grumble.

A grumble is an expression of discontent. It's a complaint. It's not a constructive criticism that seeks to better the other person. It's expressing misery for the sake of misery, misery that you know is not right (that's why you do it under your breath and mutter it), misery that you want to express in order to make people to feel just like you do. Grumble. Grumble. Grumble.

What do we grumble about? Do you grumble against our government? Bunch of crooks in there that serve themselves and not the people that elected them. Grumble. Grumble. Grumble. Do you grumble about our health problems? Four doctors appointments and I don't feel better at all. They're all a bunch of hacks! Grumble. Grumble. Grumble. Do you grumble against your parents? They won't let me do what I want to do. They're always holding me back. They don't know what is in my best interest. Grumble. Grumble. Grumble. Do you grumble against other people at church? There they go, looking all smug, all holier than thou. Hypocrite. Grumble. Grumble. Grumble.

Did you catch whom the Israelites were grumbling against? It was Moses and Aaron, as if Moses and Aaron were the ones who made the decision to lead them out of Egypt, who led them away from their pots of meat and ate all their food. Yet, who were they really grumbling against? Moses and Aaron were following God's lead, his instructions, not their own. So, when the Israelites were grumbling against them, they were grumbling against God.

All of our grumbings also come back to being against God. Yes, the government is made up of sinful people who do sinful things, but God is the one who created government on earth, who gave these people their positions of power, while at the same time he rules all things - even over sinful, earthly governments - for our good. Yes, sometimes a doctor will not be able to fix you and your body is going to be in pain, but remember that God formed your body, allowed you to wake up again this morning, gave you the strength and energy to be here today to be built up in what he does for you. Yes, your parents sometimes don't understand you and restrict

you from doing things you want to do, but God gave you these parents to be a blessing to you, that they would raise you and train you up in the ways of the Lord so that you would have the eternal benefits of what God has done for you. Yes, the people at church are sinners and saints at the same time, just like you. They aren't going to do everything right, but the same God who loved you and forgave you all your sins loved them and forgave them all their sins, shed the same blood for them as he did for you.

So, any grumble against anyone is a grumble against God. Our grumbling always focuses on the negative, an eating away at God's good reputation as a provider. Often we don't care that we're doing it because we're upset, we're in pain, we want people to feel bad like we do.

Amazingly, God doesn't lecture the Israelites about their grumbling. He doesn't lash out in righteous anger reminding the Israelites how just last month he powerfully and miraculously freed them from centuries of slavery to the Egyptians or how he buried Pharaoh's chariot army in the Red Sea while they crossed it on dry ground with walls of water on each side or how he gave them water in the desert when they would have died without it – even though he has every right to lecture them in those ways.

Instead, God acknowledges their grumbling and immediately declares, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you." (verse 4) God chose to abundantly provide for them. Grumble. Grumble. Grumble. Provide? Yes! "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..." "What is it?" ... Moses said to them, "It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat." (verses 13-15) By doing this, God solidified himself as almighty, as the same God who powerfully brought the Israelites out of Egypt, as their deliverer.

God also proves himself to be their preserver. He's not just giving food for one day but setting up an expectation of future providence. He gave specific instructions regarding the bread from heaven, the manna - how much to gather (two quarts per person) and when to gather it. The result? "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." (verses 17-18) God provided them with food day by day, had them exercise their trust in God by following his instructions to gather for 6 days, but not the seventh, but always trusting that they would have enough food.

God has us exercise the same expression of faith but in a different way. Like many of those Israelites, no doubt we feel better when we see a surplus – the cushion in savings, the dependable day the check will come. We don't like to live day by day, not knowing exactly how we will overcome future shortages. Yet God treats us like the Israelites with an expectation to gather, an expectation when there will be nothing to gather, but then trust that God will give again as he promised.

We look at a loaf of bread and see what we need today, or maybe for the week. But think of how much care God put into that single loaf of bread, just like I told the kids earlier. The primary ingredient is wheat flour. God starts to provide that loaf of bread by giving good land with fertile soil and seed to be planted. He provides sunshine and rain. He makes the seed grow. Then God gives people who harvest the wheat, who grind it into flour. God gives us bakers who mix that flour with other ingredients and bake it, package it, ship it to the grocery store. God gives us grocery stores with all their employees – the stockers, the cashiers. God gives us the money to buy the bread. He gives us a way to get to the grocery store and safely. He gives us a good government who doesn't stop us from buying the loaf of bread or confiscating it. He gives us good neighbors who don't steal our bread. He gives us good health, an appetite to eat the bread. He gives us a home with a pantry to keep the bread so that animals don't get in and eat it.

All that for a single loaf of bread. Then think about what else is in your pantry, your cupboards, your fridge, your freezer. The Israelites had manna in the desert, but look at what we have in our homes! And God does this for billions of people every single day and for thousands of years and counting. He provides all this even if we grumble about the bread butts that we don't want or the crusts we cut off. We may grumble, but our God so richly provides our daily bread like a rain shower of bread from heaven.

But God is not just a provider of bread. He is our deliverer as he was to the Israelites. He gives us also bread that never spoils, bread that fills our hunger spiritually. He gives us Jesus, the true Bread of Life. As Jesus himself declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." (John 6:35) He is the substance, his life, his perfection, his obedience, that is what satisfies our souls through all eternity, never to be spiritually hungry again.

Amazingly, no matter how much we grumble, God provides us with bread. He provides us with the daily bread our bodies need using so many people and things in nature to do so. He provides us with Jesus, our true Bread of Life, that fills our spiritual hunger for all eternity. Forgive us, Lord, when we grumble. Thank you for providing for our body and soul in spite of our grumbling. Amen.