

Middle/High School Sunday School Lessons by

rfour.org

Year 4: Session 3 – The Israelites and the Wilderness

Class 8: Numbers 11:11-29 – Moses and the stress of leadership

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Read and discuss the story of Moses feeling the weight of leading the Israelites
- Highlight / discuss the concept of teamwork (or lack of it) to help illustrate what Moses is experiencing
- Explain, encourage, and then practice the idea of listening prayer

Materials needed:

1. Movie clip (available on rfour.org) from *Apollo 13*
2. Electronics that show the video clip
3. You'll want to print out the last page and make two or three copies per person in class
 - You'll also want writing utensils for each student, too

THE LESSON

OPENING PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

- One of the things we do every class is ask and answer the opening question at the beginning of class – because it helps us 1. Learn more about each other and 2. Helps “warm us up” for some of the ideas in the upcoming lesson. So we’re going to do that now.
- So here’s the opening question for today’s class. I [the teacher] will ask the question and then to give you some time to think of an answer, I will answer first.
- Once I answer the question, we’ll go around the circle and each of us will answer.
- When it’s your turn, start with your name and then answer the question to the best of your ability.
- *Here’s this week’s question:* What is something that you wish other people did more often?

INTRO

- Last class, we started a new session about the Israelites in the wilderness.
- The stories that we’ll read in this session are what the Israelites do (somewhat) immediately after leaving Egypt
- And, what we’ll mostly see is that the Israelites have a hard time with freedom and they have a hard time trusting God after leaving Egypt.
- In today’s story, we see that Moses is pretty stressed out by the Israelites’ lack of trust
- In fact, today’s story happens in the middle of one of stories we read last week.
- In the second story we read last week, the Israelites complain to Moses about food.

- In today's story, we'll read about Moses' response to their complaint. This response happens *before* the Israelites eat too much quail and die from it.

TRANSITION TO VIDEO

- One of the things/ideas that will help us think about what is happening in today's story is the idea of teamwork and leadership
- Teamwork at its best is when members have certain areas of expertise that they can provide and share with the rest of the team so that the team can achieve its goal
- One of those areas of expertise that a person might have is to lead the team.
- This does not mean that person knows everything and just tells everyone what to do.
- Instead, the leader needs to know what the problem or goal is and communicate that problem and goal to other people on the team so that they know how to best apply their own skills to help the team.
- To help us think about what this model of teamwork might look like, let's watch the following clips from the movie "Apollo 13."
- The movie is about a space shuttle that has developed a number of problems since launch and the NASA team is trying to figure out how to get the team home safely.
- The following scenes are about NASA trying to solve one particular problem facing the astronauts: That the astronauts would have safe air to breathe.
- Let's see how they attempt to solve this problem...

WATCH MOVIE CLIP

ASK

- So what's the initial problem? (killer gases are polluting the astronauts' air)
- What's the solution? (make a filter)
- And what's the problem with solution? (they only have square filters, but they need a round filter)
- The people who are in charge – do they come up with the solutions? (no)
- Who *did* arrive at a solution? (the engineers)
- Did it seem like a stressful and busy situation? (yes)
- Do you think the situation would've ended differently if the leaders didn't have teams and would've had to also figure out the solutions? (yes / probably)
- For those who answered "yes or probably," do you think the situation would've ended better or worse?

TRANSITION to Scripture Story

- In today's story, we will see that there are a number of problems facing Moses
- And, we'll see that Moses is overwhelmed by his job of leading the Israelites – mostly because, as we'll see, he doesn't have a team to help him
- Let's see what happens

READ Numbers 11:11-29 (*recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse*)

11So Moses said to the Lord, "Why have you treated your servant so badly? Why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? 12Did I conceive all this people? Did I give birth to them, that you should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse

carries a sucking child,' to the land that you promised on oath to their ancestors? 13Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they come weeping to me and say, 'Give us meat to eat!' 14I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me. 15If this is the

way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once—if I have found favor in your sight—and do not let me see my misery.”

16So the Lord said to Moses, “Gather for me seventy of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tent of meeting, and have them take their place there with you. 17I will come down and talk with you there; and I will take some of the spirit that is on you and put it on them; and they shall bear the burden of the people along with you so that you will not bear it all by yourself. 18And say to the people: Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wailed in the hearing of the Lord, saying, ‘If only we had meat to eat! Surely it was better for us in Egypt.’ Therefore the Lord will give you meat, and you shall eat. 19You shall eat not only one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, 20but for a whole month—until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you—because you have rejected the Lord who is among you, and have wailed before him, saying, ‘Why did we ever leave Egypt?’” 21But Moses said, “The people I am with number six hundred thousand on foot; and you say, ‘I will give them meat, that they may eat

for a whole month’! 22Are there enough flocks and herds to slaughter for them? Are there enough fish in the sea to catch for them?” 23The Lord said to Moses, “Is the Lord’s power limited? Now you shall see whether my word will come true for you or not.”

24So Moses went out and told the people the words of the Lord; and he gathered seventy elders of the people, and placed them all around the tent. 25Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do so again. 26Two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested on them; they were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. 27And a young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” 28And Joshua son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, “My lord Moses, stop them!” 29But Moses said to him, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!”

ASK

- Verse 11 – Who is Moses talking to? (God)
- What is another word we can use to describe having a conversation with God? (prayer)
- Verse 11 and 12 – In Moses’ prayer, then, how does Moses describe the people of Israel? (as a burden, who are like infants, needing to be carried and fed – basically that they are helpless and his responsibility. And, what did he ever do to God to receive this responsibility!?!)
- Verse 13 – Here’s the genesis of the current problem -- that the Israelites want meat. That was last class’ story, but do you remember who started all the complaining? Hint: Starts with an “r” (the rabble – a subsection of the whole, but their complaining and perspective of scarcity became contagious and eventually affected all the Israelites)
- Verse 14 – What does Moses tell God he, Moses, cannot do? (carry all of the people)
- Verse 15 – What would Moses rather have God do to him? (put him to death; put him out of his misery)
- Sounds like this is a pretty tough situation on Moses. What do you think about Moses’ request? (seems – overly theatrical – but also stresses how stressed /anguished he, Moses, is by the situation)
- Verse 16 – Does God respond to Moses? (yes)
- Verse 16-17 – What does God tell Moses to do? (gather 70 elders [aka folks with leadership qualities] and empower them to deal with the people.
 - Note [*optional to share*]: This idea of taking a leader’s spirit and putting it on others closely mirrors the story of Elisha receiving double the spirit of Elijah in the chariot of fire story, as well as the “Pentecost” story in John, where Resurrected Jesus breathes God’s spirit on his disciples)
- Verse 18-19 – What does God tell Moses to tell the people? (you’re going to eat so much meat that you’re going to be sick of it – literally)
- Verse 21 – How many people does Moses say there are? (600,000! – Note: This number is not historical fact. This is a number that’s meant to say “A WHOLE LOT OF PEOPLE.” If you want to try and figure out the actual size, the usual range that most Biblical scholars put out there is between 10k and 20k – which is still an incredibly large number of people to feed)

- Verse 21-22 – Does Moses believe God about the meat part? (Nope)
- But what does Moses do with his doubt? (directs it at God; actually says it to God)
- Verse 23 – What is God’s response? (wait and see)
- Verses 24-27 is a description of God doing what God said God would do regarding leadership among the 70 chosen individuals. But in verse 28, what is Joshua concerned about? (that there are two men prophesying in camp and that Moses should stop them)
- Joshua’s concern here is that they are doing Moses’ job. Moses doesn’t seem to care about that. In fact, in verse 29, what would Moses like to see happen? (that EVERYONE be prophets and help with Moses’ job)

TELL

- Two main themes in this story to keep in mind: 1. The central role of prayer in this story and 2. What a team looks like when God is part of the team.
- First, the prayer part: Note that Moses doesn’t vilify God in his complaints – he doesn’t make God his enemy, doesn’t reject God in the same ways the Israelites do by saying, “We want to go back to the life we lived in Egypt before you, God, made it so terrible.”
- At the same time, Moses doesn’t hold back in letting God know how he really feels.
- But, because Moses brings his complaints to God, *and then listens for a response*, options become apparent/visible to Moses that were not previously known or considered
- In other words, by engaging in a prayerful conversation with God where Moses lets loose with complaints and despair, by letting it all hang out, Moses is then provided practical insight and understanding (in the form of response from God) about how to move forward
- Second, the teamwork part: God understands that Moses shouldn’t be alone in his work.
- Also, God understands that one of the things that Moses’ team needs to do is pay attention to God, just like Moses is doing.
- Moses starts to understand this as well at the end of the story when he tells Joshua, “If only EVERYONE would pay attention to God and share God’s words with everyone else!”

TRANSITION to ACTIVITY

- This thing that Moses was telling Joshua is still true today
- In fact, this is what Moses’ answer to today’s opening question would be: “If only everyone would more often pay attention to God and share God’s words with everyone else!”
- This team that Moses made in today’s story – a group of people who pay attention to God – is a lot like what the church is meant to be.
- One way we can participate on the team that Moses started (way back when) is to practice our listening prayer skills
- Both the talking and the listening part
- So let’s do some practicing of our talking and listening to God

EXPLAIN ACTIVITY

- So what we’re going to do is “text” God
- Strangely enough, we’re going to do it by *writing* things down, though
- So I’m going to hand out to you paper with pictures of text bubbles.
- Your texts would go on the right and God’s texts would go on the left

- And what you're going to do is text God and then write down what you think God would text back to you
- You can use as many pieces of paper as you want; the text bubbles may not be conducive to how much or how little you want to write, but try to engage in a real text conversation like you would with someone else. Ask questions, give compliments, make jokes, share pictures, etc.

MENTION WHAT TO CONSIDER "TEXTING" TO GOD and WHAT GOD MIGHT "TEXT" BACK

Some things for you to consider texting to God (will also be on handout):

- Questions you have about why God said or did something in one of the Bible stories we've been reading
- Sharing a concern you have that's bothering you right now
- Thanking God for something you are happy about; also just be polite – thank God for God's time and for listening to you

Some things to consider that God might text to you (will also be on handout):

- God likes you and loves you and wants you to know this – so maybe text some compliments to yourself from God
- God wants to be in communication with you/us (as we've seen in the stories we've read so far this year, God is CHATTY, even to Cain who completely ignored God) – so maybe have God text some thank yous for texting / checking in.
- If you have a problem, God may not have a solution for you to hear, but may help you identify what the next step of action might be – such as "who to talk to next about your concern" or "what you might do next so that you can better understand why a certain thing is happening."
- If you have a problem, maybe you already know the solution, but in texting it to God, God might affirm your solution, add some suggestions to your solution or simply empathize with what you are experiencing/having to go through
- Any questions?
- Note that I'll invite us to share our texting conversations after we're done, but you do not need to share them.
- I'll give us 5 to 10 minutes to do this. I hope you all give it a try. If you don't, that's fine, but don't interrupt/distract the class / your fellow students. Just wait quietly.

DO ACTIVITY

ASK

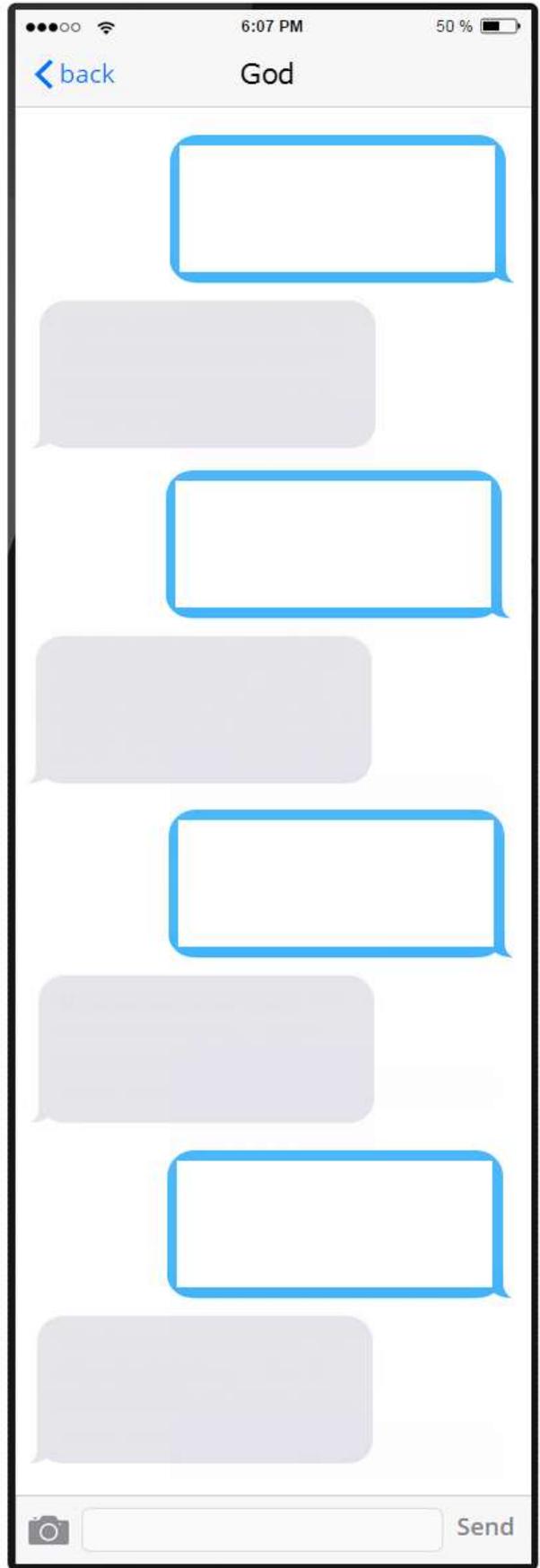
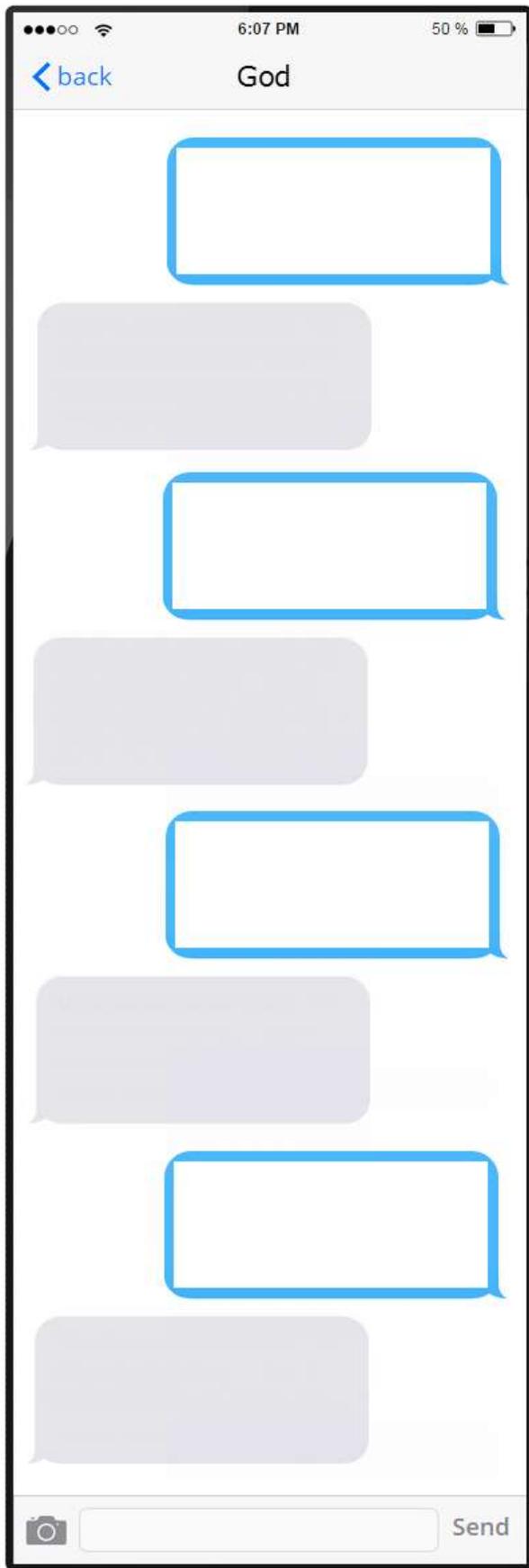
- How'd it go? Did you find it easy or hard to do?
- What part was harder? The talking or the listening?
- Does anyone want to share one of their conversations? For those of us who are listening, this is not a joke -- we do NOT make fun of those who share. If something is funny, it's ok to laugh, but we do not laugh at what is being tried here. It's a new thing, but it's also an important thing.
- Note: *Teachers, it'd be really really good if you model / share one or two of your own – also, don't expect too many students to share their own*

TELL

- Thank you everyone for doing this!

- And remember, you don't need this type of paper, and you don't need this class to do this yourself at home or at school.
- You don't even need paper. You can just do this silently by sitting quietly for a few minutes and having these types of conversations in your mind.
- But remember, this is a new thing, so just like other new things you try, it may not make sense all the time
- If you have questions or want to talk about this experience or other experiences you have while trying this, feel free to talk to one of us or the pastor.

CLOSING PRAYER --- *see below for print out / hand out*



To put on the back of the handouts (optional)

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