

Memory is good. We all value a good memory. We like to tell stories about the past. God even believes in remembering. God told Israel on more than one occasion, "I remember my covenant with your ancestors." God also wants them to "remember it was I who brought you out of Egypt."

While remembering has its upside, sometimes memory can be a little deceiving. Often it evolves into more of a romantic ideal. Have you ever visited the old home place of a relative where you used to go to as a child? In your mind it looks like this. (picture of mansion) But when you go back after 30 years, it looks more like this (picture of shack). Memory sometimes distorts reality.

Other things distort reality. Personal perception often distorts reality. When I was in seventh grade, we lived in a community where it was commonplace for kids to have their own horse. Every day after school my friends and I used to ride horses together. I had a boyfriend and after awhile our relationship went on the rocks. Why? He called my horse a nag. My perception of myself and my horse was this (show picture of racehorse) but he saw my horse differently (show picture of the nag). I was so insulted that we broke up!

The children of Israel had a similar misperception of reality. Their memory of their past life was distorted. They forgot all about the chains, the whips, the making bricks without straw, the death edict against their male babies, the threats, and their cry to God. They remembered "sitting around fleshpots and eating lamb stew and bread until they had their fill." Now I find it hard to believe that their perception was so distorted, but it's true. Here's what's written about it in the book of Numbers: "*We ate fish in Egypt - and got it free! - to say nothing of the cucumbers and melons, the leeks and onions and garlic*" (11:4-5 *The Message*).

If you were God, what would you think? Knowing the story now, as we have followed it closely over the past four months, we shake our heads. Those ungrateful, selfish people! Well then, you are probably surprised that God simply said, "I'm going to rain down bread from heaven for them – today! And, I'm not going to stop until they are safely in the land of promise."

Now doesn't that seem odd? Isn't that amazing? I mean that God is so generous? Why would God do that? What a wonderful God!

Is that your impression of God? I always want to have that picture of God, for that is how God is. God is overwhelmingly benevolent and generous beyond measure.

If they were my children I would have probably let them live on the street to fend for themselves. Some parents do indeed abandon responsibility for their children's needs.

Jeannette Walls knows what it's like to have parents who think it's okay to raise their children living on the street, for that is how she grew up. Now a successful New York City news reporter, she grew up in Arizona and California and Nevada, always running from creditors, sometimes living in their car, or in shacks, or even in cardboard boxes. Father an alcoholic, mother often neglecting to cook because she preferred to paint a picture, often the children went without food for days, or, dined on sticks of butter or maggot-ridden ham. Ms. Walls writes in her book, *The Glass Castle*, once when she was three, she was badly burned as she stood on a chair over a

boiling pot of water, trying to fix hotdogs for herself and her three siblings while her drunken parents slept it off. It's a heart-wrenching, true story.¹

And when we hear those stories where parents don't act in love or refuse to take responsibility for their children, we sometimes erroneously blame God for the shameful situation. Truthfully though, if we seek God, God will provide, and happiness comes when we seek and are grateful for God's provision.

But Israel wasn't into appreciation. Freedom from slavery didn't seem to mean much to them, at least not as much as security. For some reason they were terribly anxious and did not anticipate anything good from God, even though they had seen months of God's efforts to rescue them.

Perhaps God acted generously and patiently so they could learn what God is like. Or perhaps God was generous because it's simply in God's nature to be generous; God just can't help Himself. *Jesus said, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" (Mt. 7:11)*

Indeed our Father in heaven provides. This passage shows us God provides both bread for their stomachs and spiritual nourishment through the Sabbath day of rest.

The Bible is filled with passages that tell us this. Can you think of some?

- Psalm 104 – God opens His hand and we are filled with good things (27-28)
- Jesus says pray and ask - "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11)
- Jesus - Feeding of the 5,000 with two fish and five loaves (Mt 14:13-21) and
- 4,000 - Jesus did not want them to send them away hungry (Mt 15:32-38)
- We read earlier from Matthew: Jesus said, "Don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers. But you are a believer whose heavenly Father already knows all your needs. (6:31-32).

These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, he says. Do these things dominate your thoughts, too? Or do you allow yourself to seek God first, with the joyful knowledge that God will take care of your needs? (6:33)

To be honest, I am stunned by this message myself. In researching, I was amazed at how overarching this theme is in the Bible. God provides willingly. God is open handed. We don't have to worry.

Listen to this – even the meaning of "Bethlehem," the city of King David, the city where Jesus was born means "House of Bread." God feeds His children!

Now, listen to how Jesus ties it all together in John's Gospel (6:30-35).

¹Jeanette Walls, *The Glass Castle* (New York: Scribner, 2005)

- The Jews said to him, *"Show us a miraculous sign if you want us to believe in you. What can you do? After all, our ancestors ate manna while they journeyed through the wilderness! The Scriptures say, 'Moses gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, Moses didn't give you bread from heaven. My Father did. And now he offers you the true bread from heaven. The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." "Sir," they said, "give us that bread every day." Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."*

So God feeds us, **both** physically **and** spiritually.

How does God feed us spiritually? He gave the Sabbath, a day of rest. That gift of rest is the reason we worship here today. Worship is expressing honor and gratitude for all God has done. It all began here. Later, God will teach them how to worship on that day. Without Exodus 16, there would be no weekly distinctive worship. We will see over the next few weeks how God develops this concept of worship. It goes right along with God's faithful provision of food.

Notice, God once again used this whole situation as a test. Did you hear it?

Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not (Ex 16:4).

What's the test? Following God daily. They had to seek the bread of heaven daily. Each person was responsible for going out and gathering. They were not allowed to hoard. They were not to go out on the seventh day, but trust God had given enough. The tests reveal daily dependence on God and daily connection to God.

God never stopped providing. God was and is consistently, regularly, without fail, present. **You can count on that, like you can count on the morning.**

When you show up, you will be fed. This is wilderness lesson number two.

Who remembers lesson number one? (Have faith.) Lesson one challenges us to believe God.

Lesson number two is: Each one must be dependent on God every day, going out expectantly for that day's provision and rest from work on the Sabbath.

But some were stubborn, insisting on hoarding their manna, working on the Sabbath, insisting God accommodate life to their specifications. And, that stubbornness was to their detriment. It clouded their vision of the true act and power of God. They lost out. Things didn't go well for them and God was angry.

Where are you? Insisting on your way? Or gratefully going as God directs?

The children of Israel looked back to Egypt – they longed for their old, cruel master because they weren't so sure this new master would come through. Do you believe this master? Will you take a risk seeking Him, knowing He will come through to provide for you, even if the whole world doubts he will? I guarantee you, trust God and you will be filled with good things.

AMEN