

LIVING FREE - Week 4

Monday, June 28

Last week we began our conversation about technical leadership as opposed to adaptive leadership. And yesterday in worship, we began to look at God's leader Moses. As we are getting started this week, suffice it to say, Moses had an amazing story. He was born at a time when Pharaoh sought to kill all the male Hebrew babies. Pharaoh wanted to keep his workforce going, but the Hebrews were growing too large in number. His plan was to limit the birth of males that might rise up against him but maintain his slave population at levels that would sustain his work projects. Moses' mom, Jocabed, hid him after he was born, but she could only do this for so long. In desperation, she placed him in a basket to float him to safety down the Nile. She prayed that the Lord would provide for her son, and God did so in surprising ways. The basket is discovered by a daughter of Pharaoh. The Bible later tells us her name is Bityah, meaning daughter of the Lord. It was a miraculous salvation for Moses as he was nursed by his mother but raised in Pharaoh's court. There was no better place for Moses to be to understand Egyptian court life and also to see the plight of his own people. Now, why does this matter as we read the book of Numbers? Because Moses is living the anti-hero story. If you think about it, all the stories tell of the person that comes to be, far from royal life, and then is swept to the throne by some extraordinary event. But for Moses, it was the opposite. He was raised in the royal court and then ran from it, never to return. He sought no throne. Instead, he wound up tending sheep in the wilderness. The Lord called him and asked him to lead the people from their slavery. Moses had no desire to do this job. Actually, he turned God down three times. He wasn't hankering for power. He was happy by himself. You see, the story of Moses turns the story of the world on its head. In the world, it is power and position and status that wins the day. It is the person of royal birth that may wander but then return to assume his throne. I think of the lion king for example. But the Moses story is not about him but about how God works through the child of the slave woman to bring his people out. It is the people on a heroic journey, and yet they fail and whine at every turn. You see, in this story, the hero is not who we expect. The hero is God.

Numbers 11:14

¹⁴ I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me. ¹⁵ If you will treat me like this, kill me at once, if I find favor in your sight, that I may not see my wretchedness."

Now, here is Moses complaining to the Lord that he cannot carry the people all by himself, but he is never the one that has carried the people. The Lord has done this, and the Lord will do so in this instance as well. That is a danger of leadership. Leaders can think they are making life happen. Moses feels the burden of doing something God never asked him to do. We can do this as well. We can forget that God is the hero. It is not the parents or the business leader or the professor or the doctor. First, their skills and calling come from the Lord. Second, they can use their craft, but they cannot guarantee the outcomes. The doctor can't save every patient or guarantee they will respond to the chosen therapy. Now, here is the epitome of the anti-hero. God in Christ. We are told that Jesus had nothing in his appearance that people might be drawn to him. He was born to a poor couple from the boonies, and this couple had not yet married. At birth, he was laid in a feeding trough used for animals. He grew up to work a common trade, one of little significance in our world. He never attended school, never wrote a book, and never traveled to see the world. In the eyes of the world, he was a nobody. And, he wasn't swept to a throne either. He continually laid aside power and position. He was lifted high, not on a throne, but on a cross. It seemed utter foolishness for this to happen as it was the most disgraceful thing in the world at the time. But it was here God was working. And,

unlike Moses, he did carry all the people. The sins of the world fell upon him. Even in this, he sought no glory for himself but only for the Father of lights. You see, God's way is not like our own. This is what Moses, as humble as he was, had to learn time and again. Moses wanted the people to listen to him. He wanted his leadership to change the day, but the day was never his. It always belonged to the Lord, and it always will. This is something we must learn as well. Whether we are parents or business leaders, doctors or carpenters. The day belongs to the Lord. Yes, we are to serve as the Lord calls us, but outcomes rest with God. I think this must be why the psalm we have from Moses, Psalm 90, ends with these words:

Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands! -Psalm 90:17

Yes, only God can do that. And, God did this for Moses. This why we are still learning from his life today. As we think of that and review his story, from the boy in a basket in the river, into Pharaoh's court and then to the wilderness to lead the people, he was living a story written by the Lord. Can you see this about your life?

Let's pray:

Lord God, you alone are God. You know the end from the beginning, and we are living in the story that you have written from before time began. Enable us to trust you when we cannot see where life is going, or when it takes a turn that we did not plan on. Remind us of your glory, and lead us to worship you. For in your name, we pray. Amen.

Tuesday, June 29

I want to stay with the challenges of Numbers chapter 11 because there are so many lessons for us to learn. As we remember, Moses had had enough. The people were complaining once again. Yes, they were free from Pharaoh's sweat shops. They had the promised land before them. God defeated the enemy and set them at liberty. But the wilderness revealed a deeper and more pervasive battle that the Lord could not win for them. It is not the battle against exterior forces, foreign armies or even for resources like food. It is an interior battle. The battle of the heart. Up this point, the Lord provided everything they needed. Food and water. Security and hope for the future. We even have in this chapter, a description of the manna the Lord provided to them.

Here it is:

Numbers 11:7-9

⁷Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its appearance like that of bdellium. ⁸The people went about and gathered it and ground it in handmills or beat it in mortars and boiled it in pots and made cakes of it. And the taste of it was like the taste of cakes baked with oil. ⁹When the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell with it.

Why provide a description of manna in the middle of this scene? Really, do we need to know about this? Yes, I think it might help us see what is happening. First, the word manna sounds like the word for "what." Or, you could say the word manna means "what is it?" That actually may be the first thing the people said when they discovered this gift of God. What is it? Yes, it was like a flaky white honey sweet material. It wasn't thick like bread, but it could be made into cakes. You could eat it as you found it or cook it lightly if you wanted. It was something of a superfood that the Lord provided for his people to be nourished and sustained in the wilderness. It fell with the dew of night in such a supply that the people had plenty to go around. There need be no fear of running out of it. But you know what happens when the same thing is on the menu day after day, meal after meal. People began to grumble. Here was the thing about their grumbling. It wasn't true.

Numbers 11:4-6

Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, "Oh that we had meat to eat!"⁵ We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. ⁶But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at."

They made Egypt sound like the buffet line on a cruise ship. Yeah, we had all kinds of food and plenty of it when we were in Egypt. Really? They are experiencing Egypt nostalgia? Have they forgotten the bitterness of slavery? Now, in the wilderness with the Lord, Israel has no enemy breathing down their necks. They are not in danger or starving or being taken captive, but they are profoundly unhappy. Why is this? The challenges we have in our lives most often have both an outward and inward component. For example, you may experience a cancer battle that can be treated with surgery or chemo-therapy. But there is also an inner battle. There is fear and anxiety, doubt and perhaps anger. It is a spiritual and psychological battle for the people. Likely, the people are less upset about the fact that they have to eat manna for another day than they are afraid for their future. They are living in a world in between. They are not in Egypt, but they have not arrived at the land of promise either. What sort of stress does this create for them? What are they afraid of? Often, we would choose the security of further slavery over the uncertainty that lies before us. This is why we may choose to stay in a bad job or unhealthy relationship. We choose the devil we know over the devil we don't know. Now, let's think a little more about the internal battle. Israel made this about a battle with God for more variety in their food, but their battle was with their own fears. Yes, God can and does help us live with our fears, and God will help his people in this moment. He's going to show Moses that there are other leaders around him and that he is not alone. The Lord is going to show the people that he can provide them whatever food they need. I think this is why we hear about manna. The people don't even really know what it is or where it is coming from, but the Lord is taking care of his people. They need to learn to trust him. Now, our internal battles are most often rooted in fear and insecurity. We are tempted to feel alone and vulnerable in the world. We feel this acutely. This is why we like to build up financial reserves and watch our investments. It is why we think through what we would do if the bottom fell out of our lives. We calculate how we'd make it, how we could provide for ourselves and take care of ourselves. These are signs that our hearts dwell on the border of fear and insecurity. Sandy and I have a bag in the garage that I call our run to the hills bag. If a hurricane comes, we can grab the bag and have the basics of what we need. Here's the funny thing. I don't even remember what is in the bag. It is so old the items in there could hardly be of any use. Yes, we've been fine. No, this doesn't mean we don't plan for emergencies. We should. It does mean that at all times we trust God. He is the one that takes care of us. What person by worrying can add even a single hour to his or her life? Jesus asked this question of his disciples. That is where we are. So, how do we solve the internal problem? It takes time to build trust. It takes seeing the faithfulness of God over years and through the seasons of life. That is why the Lord has his people in the wilderness for so long. It is also one of the grand purposes of God in our lives right now. That you might learn to know and trust the Lord. Then you will be able to enjoy his peace and the freedom that the Lord has provided to you.

Let's pray:

Faithful and loving Father, we have contingency plans. We've given a whole lot of thought to what it will take to provide for us going forward, and what will happen when the storm comes. We trust our plans. Enable us to live in your care and peace. Show us the cross so that we might come to trust you and your ways in our lives and in the world. To the praise of your name. Amen.

Wednesday, June 30

Today, we look at an interesting truth about the way God works in the world. Yesterday, we began looking at the complaining of the people over their food. Manna. What is it? God provided this superfood during Israel's time in the wilderness. It provided everything they needed, but the people could not be content with the Lord's provision. Imagine, here was food that fell from heaven to a people rescued from slavery. They were free from physical bondage, but they had so much to learn.

Here's the text we read yesterday:

Numbers 11:4-6

Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, "Oh that we had meat to eat!"⁵ We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic.⁶ But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at."

Ok. This complaining was too much for Moses. Why was it too much for Moses, and how did God deal with it? First, Moses had seen this before. We saw this in the book of Exodus that detailed the first months and years after Israel was set free. Moses seemed to take the complaining of the people in stride. Indeed, it seems like the very same things happened from the start. But now, Moses can't take it. What has changed? I think that is the problem. Nothing has changed. The people seem to be where they were in the beginning. They have learned nothing. They have not come very far at all. This must be very frustrating for Moses. He's led the people for a few years, and they seem to be as he first found them. They haven't grown at all. Now, of course, the Lord is going to deal with this. He will provide them with so much meat they won't know what to do with it all. But we may wonder, if God can give them meat, if God can bring them daily manna, why doesn't he just change their hearts? Why doesn't God use his power to make them content? Here is what we learn about God. He will use his power to change nature for their benefit, but he will not use his power to change their nature. Why? That cuts across the plan the Lord has to know them and for them to change over time. And, the Lord is willing to take the time that is needed to change his people, even though it means taking more than one generation. Doesn't it amaze you that God has taken hundreds of years to bring about change in human beings? He hasn't used miraculous powers to do that though the Lord does send his people quail. For example, it wasn't until about two hundred years ago that the British empire outlawed slavery. The change in the law happened in the United States about a hundred and fifty years ago. We know that God made each human being to bear his image, and slavery is not fit for human beings, but God gave time for human beings to come to see this. Why is that? Do you ever wonder about this? It is true. The Lord brought his people from slavery to freedom. But he has not forced upon humanity a change in their sinful nature. He has opened a way through Christ for us to become a new creation. But even in our new life in Christ, this is not forced upon us. We are encouraged to learn to keep in step with the Spirit of God, to walk in the Spirit, to yield to the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God is not forcing new life upon us as much as leading us toward a new life. We can go with the Spirit or frustrate the Spirit. Here's why. It has to do with what God wants. He wants us and is willing to take the time with humanity that is needed for us to know him and to learn his ways. He is patient with humanity, with each of us personally as well. Even Jesus did not compel anyone. Instead, he made an offer: come to me. Follow me. This is God's way because he is love. This is his nature. There is a point at which the patience of Moses comes to an end. He can't take the stubbornness of the people's hearts any longer. He is ready to die. Jesus did die to make room for the grace of God. Now, there may be times when we just want God to do the miraculous and change our hearts or perhaps change the heart of someone else. But this is not his way. He will provide what we need for life and

godliness, and he also makes possible every aspect of our growth. But he wants to do it with us, and if that is what he wants, even God must set his pace to meet the pace of those he loves. Actually, this is one of the most important ways the Lord loves us. We see this with the people. In Exodus we are told that God didn't direct the people with Moses along the most direct path to the land of promise. No, he took them into the wilderness so that they might come to know him. There they would learn what it meant to live as a free people, a people redeemed by his grace. He knew that if they entered the land right away, they would not be ready. He knew they would cower and run from their enemies. He knew they did not know him well enough to trust him. He knew they needed time. That was love that the Lord provided them the time they needed. I like to say about my dog, when we are on a walk—her name is Bailey, and she is an 80-pound golden doodle—that either she is dragging me or I am dragging her. She drags me when she sees a squirrel or a peacock in the neighborhood. I have to hold her back, and that is not easy. Or, I am dragging her. She finds a grassy spot with a smell she just will not let go of. I have to drag her away from it for us to move forward. Here is what I would love my dog to do. Just walk with me. For us to have the same pace. This is what God wants with us. He wants to walk with us. He wants us to learn life with him. This is one reason that he made us and what he made us for. In us, this requires patience and trust as well. We are in a hurry, and the Lord is not. We are pursuing constant progress, but the Lord is pursuing us. We become impatient, like Moses did, but the Lord does not.

Let's pray:

Lord God, we like miracles. We thrive on success and progress, and you see things so differently than we do. Teach us that love is patient and kind. Teach us your way, O Lord. Thank you for your patience with us when we falter or get stuck. We want to walk alongside you, and learn to yield to your Holy Spirit. We want you to change us. Teach us that you are changing us a day at a time. Cause us to rejoice in that. For we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Thursday, July 1

Years ago, I remember being at a meeting with a pastor nearing his retirement. In the meeting, one of the other leaders present mentioned this. The years were passing, and the time would come for him to shift his ministry and let someone that is younger to pick up where he left off. In the meeting, there was a shocking change of tone. This senior leader would have none of it. There would be no discussion. He was not going to give up power. Now, for leaders there are two major dimensions of their leadership. One is power. That is the ability to be in charge of things. To run the show, so to speak. Leaders need to have some of this to lead. Moses had this for sure. God put Moses in a place of power to make decisions on behalf of the people. Kings and presidents and business leaders have this. They can hire or fire, set policy and allocate resources. They need to do these things for organizations to survive and flourish. But here's the thing about power. You cannot share it without giving some of it up. In this sense, you are losing some of your power. This is what that aging pastor would not give up. But there is a second dimension to leadership. That is influence. Influence works very differently. It is not about making things happen as much as affecting others. The thing about influence that is unlike power is that if you give it away, you don't lose influence. Actually, your influence grows. Influence is what we see in the prophets. Actually, their influence grows more when they retire, and even more when they die. They don't really have any power over anyone, but their influence can change the world.

Here's our text for today:

Numbers 11:26-30

²⁶ *Now two 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. ²⁷ And a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." ²⁸ And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, "My lord Moses, stop them." ²⁹ But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!" ³⁰ And Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.

Now, this scene comes after Moses complains before God that he has had enough. The Lord raises up seventy elders and takes some of the Spirit that he gave to Moses and places it on the elders. Now, this would look like a loss of power for Moses. We might think he would be concerned and unhappy that others have what he has had, but that is not Moses' response at all. Actually, two of the elders, these men named Eldad and Medad, refuse to come out to the special meeting, but they also receive the Spirit that the other elders receive. And Joshua, who is always looking out for Moses, becomes very upset. These two elders were not supporting Moses. They didn't even show up, but they are receiving the same Spirit. It just doesn't seem right. But Moses corrects Joshua and tells him it is ok. He wishes everyone had this gift of the Spirit. How can Moses say this? Moses knows it is not his power that is being given to them. It is the gift of influence. The way influence works is the more of it you give away, the more what you have also grows. We see this in real life with modern leaders. At one time, I was in the same presbytery as Tim Keller, the best-selling author and distinguished pastor. He had the same power in the presbytery as any other elder, but he had far more influence than the other leaders there. Do you know what he was doing? His influence was being given all around, to help plant churches, to bring along younger leaders into places of influence of their own. By giving away influence, his own influence grew. He didn't do this to gain influence but because this is what real spiritual leadership looks like. So, think of Moses. He is thrilled to see what the Lord has given him shared with others. He'd like it to be shared with everyone. Yes, there are times when Moses must assert his authority, and all leaders need to do this at various times. But the thing that stands out about Moses is his influence. This is why we are learning from him right now. His influence has spread in ways that he could never have anticipated. Now, let me go back to that pastor we started with. He never was willing to share power and, in many ways because of that, his influence also waned as his life came to an end. For me, a sad legacy was left though he was such a gifted minister. We need the help of the Spirit of God to get this right. We are afraid of losing power, but influence is what matters in the long run. That is gained by giving power and life and love away.

Let's pray:

Faithful and loving God, your ways are so much higher than our own. Even Jesus did not come to be served but to serve and to give up his life as a ransom for many. Teach us your ways, O Lord. For we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Friday, July 2

We will start with our scripture passage today from the book of Numbers:

Numbers 11:18-23

¹⁸ And say to the people, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat, for you have wept in the hearing of the LORD, saying, "Who will give us meat to eat? For it was better for us in Egypt." Therefore the LORD will give you meat, and you shall eat. ¹⁹ You shall not eat just one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, ²⁰ but a whole month, until it comes out at your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have rejected the LORD who is among you and have wept before him, saying, "Why did we come out of Egypt?"'" ²¹ But Moses said, "The people among whom I am number six hundred thousand on foot, and you have said, 'I will give them meat, that they may eat a whole month!' ²² Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, and be

enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, and be enough for them?" 23 And the LORD said to Moses, "Is the LORD's hand shortened? Now you shall see whether my word will come true for you or not."

The people were complaining about having the same manna day after day, and Moses went to the Lord in despair over this. Moses could lead the people, but he couldn't change their hearts. He couldn't bring about their contentment. Leaders want to be able to fix things, to keep those following them at peace. Likely, Moses feels like he has failed God and failed the people. Or, worse, he has given up on the people. The Lord speaks with Moses about this and promises two things. First, he will bring other leaders alongside Moses to share the responsibility of leading the people. Second, the people have been complaining about having no meat. God promises to give the people meat to eat. When Moses hears this promise, he can't believe that the Lord will bring this about. Really? In the desert? Where will the Lord be able to provide meat for so many people from? It seems absolutely impossible that the Lord could do this. Now, we may be surprised to hear this from Moses. Moses has seen the ten plagues the Lord placed on Egypt. He has seen the splitting of the sea so that Israel could pass by on dry land. He has seen the Lord bring water from a rock. What is his problem? Why can he not see that the Lord can indeed do this? I have learned as a leader that often the ones closest to the problem, whatever the problem may be, do not believe it can be solved. Years ago, when I was a computer programmer, I would sometimes come upon a problem that looked utterly unsolvable to me. I would get stuck. But the programmer that worked with me could quite easily find a solution. It was strange when this happened because I knew the problem better than he did. But we can easily get stuck in one way of seeing things. You may say at this point: well, Moses knows the Lord and has seen the Lord in action. But that is not what has Moses' attention. Here is what Moses sees.

He says:

The people among whom I am number six hundred thousand on foot, and you have said, 'I will give them meat, that they may eat a whole month!'

He sees how many people there are. He knows too well the difficulty of leading such a large mass of people and making sure they have food and water. In his way of thinking, there is no solution to the problem. Even God can't do this. They are in the desert. There is nothing to work with. Here is the man that has spoken with the Lord face to face, doubting the power and provision of God. Now, there are some important principles we can draw from this moment in Moses' life. First, what you look at and focus on will drive what you believe. Your perspective will shape what you think of God and what you think God can and will do. And, yes, we can become stuck in the way we see things. We can come to the place where we cannot see them any other way. We may come to view a relationship in the same way for so long that we cannot imagine a different future. If someone suggests otherwise, we will say it is impossible. In a sense, we give ourselves over to the problem, allowing it to rule our hearts and minds. This is where Moses is at this point. Our problems can obscure our vision of God and who he is. When this happens, we need a friend like the programmer that worked with me to help us see things from a different point of view. The second thing we need to learn from Moses is that we often have God wrong. We are constantly shaping our view of God based on our experience rather than based on who God actually is. I often meet people that tell me they cannot believe in a God that does this or that. I tell them that I don't believe in that God either. Then if they ask, I share with them about the Lord who is God. He is not limited by our perspective of him. He is not made in our image, but we are made in his. Now, here's what happened in this moment with Moses and the people. The Lord found the people complaining about manna. Soon, they will be complaining about having too much meat to eat. God drives immense flocks of quail from the sea into the desert where

the people can collect them. The harvest of meat is unimaginable. Is the Lord's arm too short? Is there anything God cannot do? Moses shows us that when we are looking so long at the problem, likely we have ceased looking at the Lord. This is where we need to keep our eyes on the Lord. When we keep our eyes on the Lord, we can remember that God can do all things. We also can then see the character of God. We can be reminded that the Lord loves his people and will provide for his people. This case is no different. If the Lord brought the people out of bondage and led them through the wilderness, will he not also provide the food they need? Does God not have a purpose in it all, even this time when they are discontent and complaining. We so easily underestimate the power of God and the engagement of God in our lives. This is why God has given us Jesus. We can look upon him and know that if God has given us his son, he will give us all things along with him that we need.

Let's pray:

Lord God, forgive us for doubting your power and your love. We know you can do all things. We know that you love us, even when we are walking through loss or pain. Remind us of your faithfulness with each new day that we might trust you with whatever comes into our lives. We also pray for others around us to behold your glory that they might rest in you. For we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Saturday, July 3

Here's our scripture for today:

Numbers 11:31-32

Then a wind from the LORD sprang up, and it brought quail from the sea and let them fall beside the camp, about a day's journey on this side and a day's journey on the other side, around the camp, and about two cubits above the ground. ³² And the people rose all that day and all night and all the next day, and gathered the quail. Those who gathered least gathered ten homers. And they spread them out for themselves all around the camp.

Sandy and I had an almost blanket agreement when our kids were growing up. If they whined to get something, we were not going to give it to them. We felt that giving in to our kids in this way...well...it would lead to more and more. It would never end. This sort of whining drives parents nuts. After a while, the kids began to learn. They remained silent or asked for things politely. Now, here we see the Lord giving in to the whining of his kids, his children. They complain about the manna and ask for meat, and the Lord provides it to them. Why does the Lord do that? Have you ever wondered why God answers some prayers yes and others no? What is God up to? Years ago, the recording artist, Garth Brooks, released a single entitled "Unanswered Prayers". Here is part of the lyrics:

*Just the other night at a hometown football game
My wife and I ran into my old high school flame
And as I introduced them the past came back to me
And I couldn't help but think of the way things used to be
She was the one that I'd wanted for all times
And each night I'd spend prayin' that God would make her mine
And if he'd only grant me this wish I wished back then
I'd never ask for anything again*

The song tells of a woman he was madly in love with and wanted to marry. He prayed asking God for her. But that didn't happen. They bumped into each other, and he discovered that she had not become what he expected, and likely he had not become what she might have expected. He looked at his wife with gratitude to God for not

answering his prayer. Likely, if you look across your life, you will see prayers you are grateful that God did not answer. At the time, you were desperate and could not see things any other way. You pleaded with God. But what you wanted was not good for you. In our text for today, the Lord answers a prayer, fulfills a request that is not good for the people. The people complain about not having meat to eat, and the Lord gives his people a bumper crop of meat. The results were not what the people wanted or expected.

Here is what we are told:

Numbers 11:33-34

While the meat was yet between their teeth, before it was consumed, the anger of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD struck down the people with a very great plague. ³⁴ Therefore the name of that place was called Kibroth-hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had the craving.

Now, what it appears happened was that, with the provision of meat, the people that craved it and whined about it gorged themselves on it. Their craving got the best of them. The text says the Lord struck them down with a great sickness. Likely, this was the sickness of eating too much meat when they had for so long been eating nothing but manna. The people understand this, so they name the place Kibroth-Hattaavah, which means “graves of craving”. Yes, the Lord worked through this moment to bring judgment on the people, but their craving dug graves for them. Wow! As adults we whine and crave just as kids do. These cravings can and often are the death of us. We can easily be destroyed by the thing we think we can’t live without. I want to go back to why God would answer this prayer. Why would he give them something that would hurt them? Remember, the people must learn how to live free. They must learn to control their own impulses and delay gratification in order to succeed in the future. They must learn not to trust their cravings but to trust the Lord in all things. Perhaps, instead of whining to the Lord, we would do better to ask God not to answer the prayers that will hurt us, to turn a deaf ear to prayers based on unhealthy cravings. Here is some of the end of Garth Brooks’ song:

*I guess the Lord knows what he's doin' after all
And as she walked away and I looked at my wife
And then and there I thanked the good Lord
For the gifts in my life
Sometimes I thank God for unanswered prayers
Remember when you're talkin' to the man upstairs
That just because he may not answer doesn't mean he don't care
Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers.*

Let’s pray:

Lord, we plead with you day after day. We know you love us, and to love us sometimes means not giving us what we want. Forgive us for putting our cravings ahead of you. Help us to trust your wisdom in our lives and to seek your face in all things. Your face we do seek. And we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.