

Moses slams his letter of resignation on the desk and declares himself done. A foldout trail map to the Promised Land falls on the ground, but he's happy to leave this Holy Hike ministry in the dust.¹ 'I didn't get a degree in peripatetic² peregrinations³ at the University of Egypt for this! My job description was utterly misleading,' he shouts.

Unaware that there will be 40 more years ahead of him, Moses has already been leading the Israelites for a while now. Thanks to Moses' leadership, these former slaves have escaped the chains of their captors and have been journeying toward the land flowing with milk and honey that they've been promised. Except that they're impatient – they want their reward, and they want it now. They've had a rough time being faithful; time and again, they've wandered from the path.

God, however, has been faithful. God has guided their leader Moses as they've escaped captivity. God has inspired Moses with an Eden-like vision of what lies ahead for God's people. God has sustained this tribe with manna from heaven both as they've drawn nearer to God's presence as well as when they've spiritually wandered away.

Still the people hunger for more – for physical and spiritual rootedness, for nourishment, for hearth and home, for a life of enjoyment above and beyond subsistence. And they are tired.

Hunger, fatigue, anger. Not a good combo.

And we encounter them this morning, at a point on their journey where they are "hangry." The Israelites remind me of that 1980s Wendy's commercial: they are like the little old ladies with their McMoses Happy Meals, looking at the big fluffy manna-bun with dismay, and demanding to know "where's the beef?!?"

'Moses! Enough already,' they complain. 'We trusted you and our God, we've followed where you've led, we've tried to embody the commandments you

¹ http://day1.org/4205-deliverance_and_deli_meat; many ideas and phrases in this sermon are borrowed or adapted from this post

² *Peripatetic*: traveling from place to place, especially working or based in various places for relatively short periods.

³ *Peregrinations*: a journey, especially a long or meandering one.

brought us from God, and we've taken our lumps when we've messed up. But now we're weary of this; we're hungry, we've been poured out and are now empty. Give us something different, something more, something better.'

Moses is tired, too. He is also anxious to sit down for a plate full of lamb smothered in tzatziki. He's ready to sleep in on the weekends and not have to problem-solve for well over six hundred thousand people⁴ who do little more than complain. His temper is short, too. And so he turns to God.

"These aren't even my kids! Did I conceive them all? Did I give birth to them? Why?!? Why is this my problem?!?" I can't help but laugh at his melodramatic attitude: "I can't deal with this on my own any longer." He demands, "give them meat, or give me death!"

But as much as I feel like poking fun at Moses at this point in his ministry, I also feel a lump in my throat when I realize that there are times when I'm not too different from him.

Moses feels that he can no longer carry the Official Holy Hikes Backpack. He is spent, burnt out. He has found the burden of this task too heavy to carry.

I, too, am prone to temper tantrums after long days of feeling like I'm carrying too much weight on my shoulders. The roles of wife and mother, sister and daughter, friend and colleague can feel overwhelming at times. Yet these are all callings I have committed to, and remain committed to. Yet they are at times "too heavy to carry, and impossible to leave" behind.⁵

There are days when my burdens make me tired, and make me feel spiritually undernourished. It is precisely at these times that I need God to bring me back to the basics. I can neither carry it all, nor does God ask me to carry it all.

Moses was a people-pleaser. And he's exasperated that he cannot provide meat for God's people. His knees have buckled under the pressure of their complaints. But God has never asked Moses to feed the people meat; they didn't need meat in the first place.

⁴ Numbers 11:21 – this is a census of only the soldiers in their group

⁵ Sara Groves

There has been blessing in Moses' burden of leadership, to be sure. God's people have escaped captivity, they have learned valuable lessons about the provision of God, and we know what they do not yet know: they **will** reach the Promised Land.

But there is also blessing in the burnout. It makes us take off our heavy backpacks and inventory of the burdens we carry; burnout provides opportunity for us to identify the heavy things that we were never asked to carry. Moses was asked to lead the people out of slavery to a land of freedom. Nowhere in his job description did God indicate that it would be easy. Or fun. Or fast, for that matter.

But Moses was never asked to carry the burdens of Israel's greediness and impatience. That metaphorical backpack that God equipped and Moses was asked to carry didn't contain a case of Slimjims. Meat wasn't part of the deal. God had all that under control: God provided for their spiritual and physical hunger by faithfully giving them their daily bread. God's provision didn't necessarily come in the form the people wanted, but it was there, and it was enough.

Moses got wrapped up in the noisy demands of his tribe and forgot the simplicity of his mission: to lead the people to the Promised Land. The people of Israel got greedy; demanding more than enough; judging insufficient what God deemed sufficient.

Moses let others define his priorities. It's a mistake many of us make. It's easy to trade the call that God puts on our lives for the demands of people we meet along the way. They ask, or they expect, and we don't know how to refuse.

I can't help but wonder: do we pick up the burdens other people give us because they in some way seem more manageable than the call of God?

And so he feels overworked, unable to meet the demands of those who rely on him, and as such, he feels alone and unsupported. Moses' pity-party-come-temper-tantrum sets the stage for yet another illustration of the providence of God. God's answer to Moses' resignation wish: find 70 trusted people to help carry the load.

God gives us people to share the load as well. Admittedly, we sometimes grumble and bicker, but we pull together as the church to share our lives and our loads, our laughter and our tears, our prayers and petitions with casseroles and communion.

We all have our own personal trail map that God has drawn out for us. Your route and mine are not the same, but your destination, my destination, the destination of all the people of God is the same: all of us are journeying toward the heart of God.

Giving up isn't really an option. Just like Moses', our job is to follow the path God has mapped out for us. We are all on a journey through the wilderness. This journey will be long, it will be hard, and there will be times when it is anything but fun. But God will continue to be faithful and present with us, making sure we have enough of the right kind of supplies in our spiritual backpacks. We can trust that God will continue to equip us for our personal Holy Hikes by providing all that we need, often in the form of other pilgrims on the journey who can help us carry our load. God will faithfully give us *this* day, and *every* day, our daily bread.