

THE STORY

Small Group Study Guide

Chapter 6

Wanderings

Timeless Truth: Failure always begins with unbelief.

Chapter Summary (Have someone in your group read the summary section.)

God's plan was clear: deliver His people through a series of miracles, defeat their enemies, give them a covenant and set of laws to make them a chosen nation, and provide them a land of promise. Simple, right? God speaks, the people listen. God delivers, the people believe. God provides, the people trust. Well, maybe not so much.

God always held up His end of the bargain: He always provided, always delivered, always kept His promises. It turns out the people were equally consistent: They always forgot, always questioned, always rebelled. Their lack-of-faith list was long. When daily bread fell from heaven, they craved a taste of Egypt. Even Moses' siblings, Miriam and Aaron, grew jealous and undermined their brother's leadership.

Then they reached Kadesh, and the perimeter of promise became a pinnacle of rebellion. Moses sent twelve leaders to spy out the Promised Land of Canaan. Ten of the twelve said the cities were too strong, the people too big and God was too small. Only two, Caleb and Joshua, trusted God. They encouraged Israel to go and take what God had given them, but the people complained and failed to believe.

Failure always begins with unbelief. So, Israel spent the next forty years wandering aimlessly in the wilderness. The faithless generation would die out before they set foot on the other side of the land of promise. Only Caleb and Joshua would outlive them all to eventually cross over into their inheritance.

Forty years later, the story comes full circle again to Kadesh, the edge of the promised frontier – and little had changed. The people needed water, so they did what they do best...they complained. And God did what He does best...He provided. The LORD pointed Moses to a rock. He told him to speak to the rock and water would pour out. Moses struck it with his staff instead. The water still gushed out, but Moses and Aaron had ignored God's instruction and lost their right of admission to the Promised Land.

Moses then commissioned Joshua as Israel's new leader before giving his farewell address. He reminded them of all that the LORD had done. He told them again about their special role as His chosen nation and how they would enjoy His blessings if they would simply love and obey Him. Then Moses died and was buried by the LORD.

The wilderness wanderings remind us that faith leads to life, and unbelief leads to death. Faith honors God, and God always honors the faithful.



Icebreaker Question: How would you classify your teen years and early 20's: Rebellious and wild? Compliant and obedient? Somewhere in between?

1. When have you felt overburdened like Moses did? When have your burdens caused you to question God's goodness? How might Moses' honest conversation with God help you handle heavy burdens in the future?
2. Israel believed the report of the faithless spies out of fear. What do you think was the cause of their consistent lack of faith and trust?
3. The manna and quail episode ended in a severe plague (p. 56-58). What Upper Story lessons was God trying to teach? How do they apply to us today?
4. God asks the question: "How long will these people treat me with contempt?" (p. 61). Do you think their actions merit such a severe word as "contempt"?
5. Israel's rebellion led to a 40 year punishment and kept an entire generation from seeing the Promised Land. How might you minister to someone whose life choices resulted in irrevocable consequences?
6. Moses is described as a "very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth." (p. 59) What examples from his life illustrate this? How would you rate your humility level? (Yes, this is another trick question.)
7. Despite his years of service, Moses' disobedience kept him from entering the Promised Land. What did Moses do wrong? Do you agree with the punishment? What does this teach you about God's expectations for leadership?
8. Moses charged Israel with passing the commandments down to their children. What is your role in teaching the next generation? What are some practical ways you can serve as a parent, grandparent or mentor?
9. Carefully reread Moses' farewell message (p. 68-71). How does he emphasize God's Upper Story of redemption?

In the time remaining ask your group members to share any of their personal reflection insights from their journal entries.

Closing Prayer



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Personal Devotion Questions

Chapter 7

The Battle Begins

Journal your answers to these questions as you read through the chapter this week. You may wish to read one day and journal the next, or spread the questions over the whole week.

Day 1

1. What can we learn about godly leadership and succession planning as we watch the baton passed from Moses to Joshua?
2. We often draw black and white lines when we disagree with others. Read Joshua 5:13-14. How do people today co-opt Jesus to ensure He's on "their side?"

Day 2

1. God gave Joshua assurances to face the coming battles, but Joshua still had to act in faith. What battles are you currently facing? How can God's presence and promises change the way you cope with them?
2. Do you suppose God viewed Rahab as a woman of sin or a woman of faith? Who in your life needs to be viewed through "grace-colored glasses"?
3. How does the destruction of peoples and cities in the Promised Land square with God's Upper Story of redemption?

Day 3

1. Observe the battle between Israel-Gibeon and the five kings of the Amorites (p. 78-80). What human factors and what divine factors led to victory? What parallels can be drawn between this battle and your own spiritual battles today?
2. Joshua is known for the statement "as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." What habits and attitudes have you seen in other families that are good examples of leading a household in serving the LORD? How can you emulate them?