

The Spirit of Crisis

Jonathan K. Dodson | Numbers 11:16-30 | January 27, 2019

Looking at the Spirit-filled Church: A crisis, God's response, Our Beliefs.

Our Crisis

In the Book of Numbers, God has rescued Israel from Egypt into a covenant relationship, based on law and love, vow and affection. Like marriage, they have entered into an exclusive commitment: He has vowed to be their God, and they have vowed to be his people. God provides and they follow. So far, God has provided not only rescue and covenant, but a godly leader in Moses, miraculous provision of manna and water, sandals that don't wear out, a visible manifestation of his presence, a pillar of cloud and fire. Pretty amazing. *But then a rabble*, a rowdy group of complainers, begins to whine. Why? They want a different diet. It wasn't just whining it was moaning, hyper-critical of their leaders and of God saying, Oh that we had meat, melons, leeks, and onions, like we had in Egypt, *But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at* (6). Some of you are having flashbacks to last night at the dinner table with your kids. I can't eat this; it makes me sick to look at it! When we want something *different* from what God has provided, we're prone to exaggerate how bad things are. I'm so lonely; I have no friends; work is unbearable; my kids are awful; my boss is a jerk. Now there's some truth in there, but the whole truth is your kids are also good; your boss provides work; there are people who care about you; and the truest, most faithful Friend in the world has pledged his life to you. *But the rabble wants what it wants!* They're set in contrast to Moses' *needs*. With mounting wailing and ingratitude, Moses can't meet their demands. So cries out, *I am unable to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me*" (15). Ever feel like you just can't go on, handle it? It's in these times we need to remember *tension and difficulty are God's appointed grace for our change*. When you're in it, face to face with the problem, it's hard to zoom out and see things from God's all-wise, all-good perspective. When we're up close to the difficulty, it's hard to see God's grace in it. Another way to say this is, as PC says, "It's a ministry to me." My child acting up, my work not cooperating, my marriage under stress: all a ministry to me, to get my sin out and grace in, to change me. When I was a new parent, I felt the difficulty of raising kids (still do) so I read books from seasoned parents. In one of them I came across this principle I still use today. Say a child is asking for something, and you say no. They ask again, no. They say, why? What do you say? *Because I said so* (reinforces your authority,

good), but not that effective. I learned from this author to say, *Because I love you, you can't have your way*. This tells your child no but attaches the no to love, not just authority. Law and *love*, vow and *affection*. When tension mounts, we need to hear our heavenly Father saying, "*Because I love you, you can't have your way*." Theologian Paul Tillich said that people who endure suffering are taken beneath the routine busyness of life to find out they are *not* who they believed themselves to be. As my graduation date from seminary approached, I started interviewing for positions. First one, it got down to me and another candidate and they called me up and said, you're more qualified but we think God is leading us to go with the other. My second interview, we really like you but we feel like we're supposed to go with so and so. This happened about eight times. I had done well in seminary, graduated with two masters degrees, had experience preaching and pastoring, and I couldn't get a job! Eventually I told God—listen I've worked hard, served all over the world, have two degrees, why won't you give me a position? And he said, Exactly! I want to humble you so your faith isn't in your credentials but in Christ. I love you enough to not give you your own way. I repented and my confidence moved from credentials to Christ, eventually leading me to City Life! *Tension and difficulty are God's appointed grace for our change*. He loves you enough to appoint trials that wear down your sharp edges to produce a humbler, gentler, kinder version of yourself. The question you have to ask: *Will I receive God's grace or dig in become a fossilized version of myself?*

God's Response

How does God respond to Moses and the rabble? God says to Moses, Gather seventy elders, who are officers, and bring to tent of meeting: *And I 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 with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone* (11:17). What's he doing? He provides for the need. How? He provides 70 men of character and wisdom (vetted through the officer selection process). We could use some new leaders and aspiring elders. Pray for an additional pastor. Sign up for the training. I can't do that; he also provides *his Spirit*. This is a ceremony at the tent of meeting, where God would descend in a cloud above the tent and speak. In the midst of all this chaos, all the bitter weeping and demands, the tension and the difficulty, where are these elders? Close to God. They are zooming out. They aren't just trying to fix things; they are listening to his voice. They are a model of *dependence*. Dependent upon the Holy Spirit. [Elders] What do you do when you hit an impasse? Moses steps back, cries out, expresses doubt, and prays.

He's dependent, not independent of God. We're told God takes some of the Spirit that is on Moses and puts it on them. Some people think this is a sharing of the portion of the Spirit's power, but it's probably more a way of saying, "The same Spirit I have given to Moses, I also give to the 70. They get nothing less than the very same Spirit of God." Same power, authority, blessing. For what? To speak special prayer languages? To feel important and spiritual? No *so that they will bear the burden of the people* with Moses. The Spirit is given for service, for encouragement of the people of God, not for self-promotion or self-distinction. And so it is today. The Spirit is given to every follower of Christ to build up the Church. *Your gifts are not your gifts; they're the Church's gifts. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone* (1 Cor 12:4-6). We have the same God and the same Spirit to serve and encourage one another. But God doesn't just put his Spirit *on* us; he puts him *in* us. You are his address! And if we're dependent upon him, *we will complain less and encourage more*. We will yield to God's appointed grace and change! Now what about this prophesying? They do it once but not again. When God calls people into leadership in the OT, often the leaders prophesy (Saul, David), a visible manifestation that God is with them. Now how does God respond to the **rabble**? He judges their want for meat. On the surface, it appears pretty harmless. If you've been eating the same thing for months, wouldn't you want a change? But verse 4 tells us they didn't just "weep" but did so out of an "**inordinate craving**." This inordinate craving said, I want a thing more than I want God. I want my way more than his way. I refuse to change. They even build a faction around them. They're not like the 70 elders, close to God—dependent—but so face to face with their wants, their pains, they *transport themselves back in time*. They recall the Egyptian diet with crystal clarity, but fail to remember the brutality of their Captors. **In romanticizing the past, idolatry distorts the present**. We think, it was so much easier to have community at that other church, in college, when in fact there were issues and challenges there too. Before kids, life was awesome. When I was single I had so much more freedom "At our last church we..." By holding our current community, marriage, friendships to a romanticized version of our former relationships, we fail to enter into true community, to actual relationships that God has placed in our lives. Inordinate craving distorts not only the past but the present; it distorts us. A demanding, not dependent, rabble. This moves you away from the Spirit of joy and toward a spirit of bitterness. But if we

embrace *difficulty is God's appointed grace for change*; it will beautify us make us a grace to those around us.

Our Belief

Two distinct groups emerge. One group is marked by:

70 Elders	The Rabble
Dependence	Weeping
Holy Spirit	Inordinate craving
Service	Demands

Which group do you want to be a part of? What makes the difference? **Spirit-charged belief.** The rabble says, Egypt is better. The elders say, God is better. Their beliefs are utterly different. The rabble's belief is rooted in a romanticized past; the elders belief in a Spirit-charged present. One says serve me; the other says let me serve. One says change me; the other says I will not change. Which group are you a part of? Will you so cling to your idols you distort yourself and others, or cling to Christ to beautify yourself and others? Now, it's not that we can't doubt or struggle. Moses himself doubts, questions God. God can handle our doubts. But the rabble also doubted. There's a doubt that leads to death and a doubt that leads to life. Moses doubted but *obeyed*. Which shows us he actually doubted his own doubts to trust the Lord, be dependent upon the Spirit. He gathered 70 and God gave him more than he needed. The rabble doubted and *disobeyed*, flared up in anger, so God handed them over to their craving, and it was the end of them. If we go on refusing, God will hand us over to our cravings, a fossilized version of ourselves. Spirit-charged belief makes all the difference. God is better. It's a ministry to me. His arm is not too short. In difficulty, in temptation, we are prompted to do what's right, what is Christlike, is not our noble inner selves; it is the voice of God; the Spirit not just upon you but in you, prompting you to believe and reflect, Jesus is better. Be encouraged: we don't have to long like Moses, Oh that **all the Lord's people were prophets; that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!**" For all God's people do have the Spirit! **To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good** (1 Co 12:7). Go, build one another up, showing the world that, Jesus is better.