

DON'T GO BACK TO EGYPT

Lesson Two

GETTING THE EGYPT OUT OF US

NUMBERS 11:4-6

The purpose of Lesson Two is encouragement. It is meant to give those trying to change, or those waiting on someone to change, a way to think about why it often takes longer than we think it should.

Why is lasting change and recovery so hard?

We may be out of Egypt, but we don't yet have Egypt out of us!*

The first point of emphasis is the Israelites' time in the wilderness. Although they are free from their Egyptian masters, they are not free from the attitudes and habits they have developed over their time in captivity. These traits can be a form of slavery. This part of the study gives a reason and a warning as to why it can take longer to change than expected.

The second point of emphasis is that beating bad habits, addictions, and changing unhealthy relationships can be less about mountaintop spiritual experiences and more about daily decisions to change. These decisions require perseverance and encouragement from others, a focus not on the scope of the change, but the next few minutes, the next decision, to walk and not faint.

ATTITUDE & HABITS

The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost — also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!" - Numbers 11:4-6

The daily grind of trying to break bad habits, addictions and change unhealthy relationships can cause discouragement.

The difficulty of making a change can cause people to diminish the pain and problems their decisions and lifestyle caused in the past. Like the Israelites in the wilderness, when the going gets tough, they might long for a past that did not really exist or one that softens the edges of the problems. The Israelites looked back on the abundance and variety of food in Egypt and overlooked the harshness of their slavery. Some may begin to focus on the past, conveniently forgetting past problems, and revising the full effect of their actions on others.

*William Bridges, *Managing Transitions*.

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LESSON TWO: GETTING THE EGYPT OUT OF US

Blessings and progress can be overlooked. Many of the Israelites in the wilderness overlooked the daily provision of the quail and manna. Successes and blessings can be taken for granted. Many have found keeping a prayer journal can be helpful. When writing down needs and concerns, it often doesn't take long to turn back a few pages to see those that have been answered and resolved. This can help us to be encouraged in our struggles and help us to be encouragers to others, reminders of the blessings received, and the progress made.



It's necessary to be realistic about the difficulties of change from deeply embedded patterns in life.

In the bestselling book, *Good to Great*, by Jim Collins, he interviews the highest ranking officer captured in the Vietnam War, Admiral James Stockdale. Stockdale, a prisoner of war for over eight years, endured repeated bouts of torture and abuse. Collins asked Stockdale how he was able to survive and deal with such a brutal experience. "I never lost faith in the end of the story," he said. "I never doubted not only that I would get out, but also that I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of my life, which, in retrospect, I would not trade."

Collins didn't say anything for many minutes, as they walked slowly with Stockdale limping and arc-swinging his stiff leg that had never fully recovered from repeated torture. Finally, after about a hundred meters of silence, Collins asked, "Who didn't make it out?"

"Oh, that's easy," Stockdale said "the optimists. They were the ones who said, 'We're going to be out by Christmas.' And Christmas would come, and Christmas would go. Then they'd say, 'We're going to be out by Easter.' And Easter would come, and Easter would go. And then Thanksgiving, and then it would be Christmas again. And they died of a broken heart."

"This is a very important lesson." Stockdale continued. "You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end—which you can never afford to lose—with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be."

In reality, deeply embedded patterns in behavior can be very difficult to change. We are reminded of the Apostle Paul's cry in Romans 7:18-19: "*For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing.*" Too often, people minimize the difficulty in changing, and when change does not come easily or comes slower than anticipated, they give up. The "we are going to be home by Christmas" crowd can lose heart and give up.

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LESSON TWO: GETTING THE EGYPT OUT OF US

Remembering to be realistic, but faithful in turning to God when overcoming patterns that limit or enslave. Someone suffering from addiction needs to set their face like flint, as Jesus did heading toward Jerusalem (Luke 9:51), realistically viewing the hardships, but having faith in God's grace, mercy, and power.

Some difficulties take longer to resolve even by the very hand of Jesus. Sometimes the healing doesn't come all at once, but gradually. See for example Mark 8:23-25:

"And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the village; and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands upon him, he asked him, 'Do you see anything?' And he looked up and said, 'I see men; but they look like trees, walking.' Then again he laid his hands upon his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and saw everything clearly."

Why did God allow the Israelites to spend 40 years in the wilderness? It likely took only a few months to get hundreds of thousands of people out of Egypt, **but it took 40 years to get Egypt out of the Israelites.** One generation that was formed by slavery had to die.

On a less literal level, it means that something must die to break bad habits and addictions and to change unhealthy relationships.

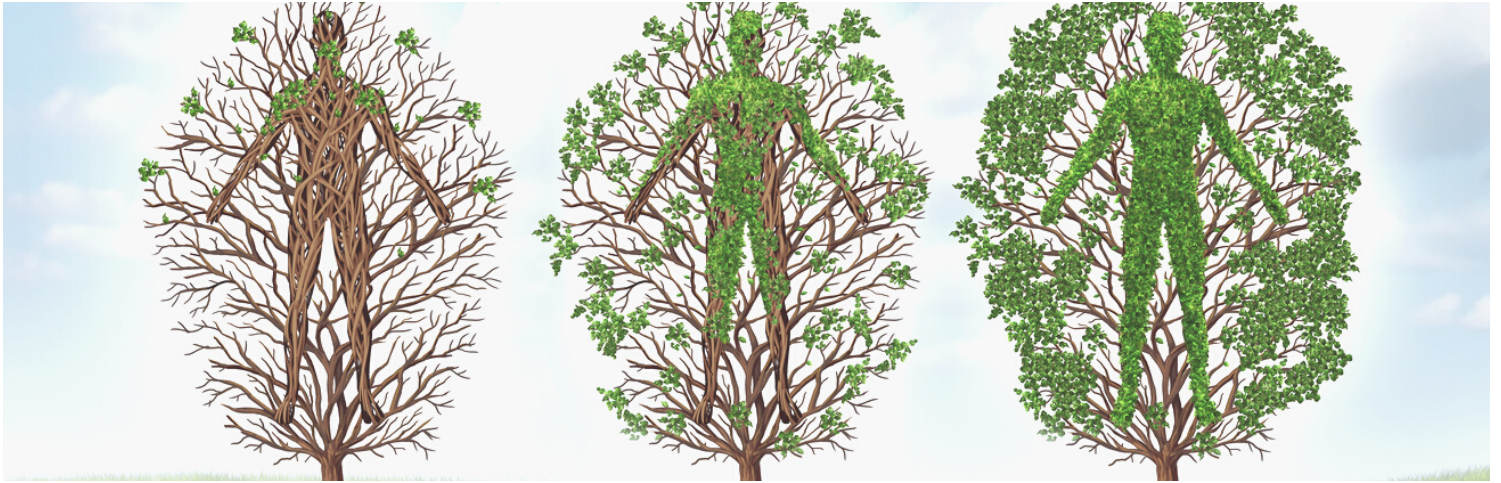
- It may mean we need to allow our pride, our tendency to blame others to die.
- It may be we need to allow unhealthy priorities to wither away.
- It may be the company we keep needs to change.

It will likely not take 40 years, but it will not take a few days either. *"It takes nine months to have a baby, no matter how many people you have on the job."* (An American Proverb)



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One reason it takes a period of time to heal, is that our brains are impacted and changed, shaped by our actions.

For example, it takes time for the brains of those in substance abuse recovery to heal. Studies show abstinence or sobriety improves many mental functions that were damaged by addiction. These range from the recovery of brain tissue volume (areas that deal with cravings and decision making), increased cortical grey matter (associated with memory, emotions, muscle control, speech and decision making) and white matter (plays a role in active learning and memory), and increased density in neocortical areas (that part of the brain associated with judgement and decision making).

This all takes time. The speed of recovery is influenced by the age of the person, the length of their abuse, genetics, and other medical factors. In a matter of weeks, one may see improved coping skills and cognitive abilities, while other skills and abilities can take months, even years to recover. **Each day in sobriety gives the brain the chance to heal and recover.**

Think of the parable of the sower in Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8. The seed that falls into the good soil is buried, does not sprout quickly, but develops roots and produces a hundredfold. Satan wants those suffering from addiction to think recovery is futile, and they must fight their own sinful nature which pushes them to quit because recovery is so difficult.

This biblical image of the seed, quietly growing underground, can be helpful for the individual in recovery and for their loved ones. Family and friends can remind the one struggling of this biblical image when discouragement sets in. The seed that seems to be inactive is actually growing and changing, like the mind in recovery is healing and transforming.



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EXAMPLE

Often the most difficult days in breaking a pattern are the days after the initial decision and before results or much change is seen. Those are days like Pastor John Claypool noted after the death of his daughter, Laura Lu.

In his book *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler*, Claypool noted that scholars observe that the climax of the following text from Isaiah is not spiritual exaltation, (soaring on wings like eagles), or even accomplishing tasks (running, and not growing weary). The pinnacle of the text is being able to walk and not faint.

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. - Isaiah 40:29-31

Claypool said the days he needed the greatest strength from the Lord were the days he simply felt it was all he could do to put one foot in front of another; to walk and not faint.

The way he dealt with grief can be applied to how we can break bad habits and addictions and change unhealthy relationships. We tend to believe the intensity of our initial commitment to change is the greatest factor in success. We may think an alter call at church or even an intense or emotional conversation is the best indicator of success. However, the best indicator of progress may just be the plan you have to get you through the morning.

Some examples:

For habits: To get through a work break without a cigarette, bring a healthy snack with you and play a game on your phone to have something to do with your hands.

For addictions: Go home a different way instead of by the club or bar that is an easy place to fall into temptation. Put your recovery meeting in your phone before the week starts, so it won't be forgotten.

For relationships: To plan how not to respond with a curt or sarcastic comment to an action or word in a relationship you are trying to improve. To have a difficult conversation rather than avoiding it and letting our feelings fester.

These are not exciting, uplifting, soaring like an eagle type of events. They are not running and not growing weary, high energy tasks. These are quiet inward personal decisions that help to walk and not faint; the decisions made in solitude to keep putting one foot in front of another. The "Walkin' and Not Faintin'" times are often what determines whether someone "goes back to Egypt" or breaks free from the bondage.



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CALL UPON
THE LORD
FOR THE
DAILY
STRENGTH
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SUMMARY

It will take time to get rid of deeply embedded patterns in relationships, long time habits, and destructive addictions. God does have the power to heal instantaneously and certainly does, at times; however, this may not be everyone's story. If someone wants to get well, they have to live out their story. It took a relatively short time for God to get his people out of Egypt once Moses arrived. Yet it took 40 years to get the effects of slavery in Egypt out of many of God's people. Don't be too discouraged when results come slower than anticipated.

Difficult days are to be expected. Those struggling should call upon the Lord for the daily strength to walk and not faint. The most fervent prayer may be needed for putting one foot in front of another, to get out of bed, to make the kids lunch, to have a conversation with a client. One can expect *"Walkin' and Not Faintin'"* days, but God gives strength to the weary and power to the weak (Isaiah 40:39).

