

Russell Kelfer

Thou Hast Lacked Nothing

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**Series: Possessing the Land:
The Process of Mentoring**

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

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For some of us, making small talk is a tough assignment. Here's an example: What do you say when someone asks, "How are you doing today?" If you tell them all your troubles, they'll:

- a- never ask you again
- b- assume you are not spiritual
- c- possibly lecture you with some evangelical clichés.

On the other hand, if you say, "Oh, just fine, thank you", they will assume you have no needs and they will:

- a- not pray for you
- b- assume you are super-spiritual
- c- assume you are not transparent enough to be real.

The problem is: we live in two worlds at the same time. The one world is a world where we get our food, enjoy our leisure, work and play and plan for the future. It is where we raise our children, get diseases, pay taxes, make friends, make enemies, grow old, and eventually die.

The other world is the world we entered when Christ entered our hearts. In that world, we experience joy through suffering, peace amidst trials, and ultimately, an eternal home where God Himself has promised to be with us and be our God. And we shall live forever and ever.

So when someone asks you: "How are you?" it all depends on what they mean. If they mean: "How is that body you live in?" (and they really want to know) it's okay to tell them that your back is out of whack, your knees no longer bend, your eyes are getting weaker, your memory's gone, but you can't remember where it went, and besides that you don't feel good. They probably won't ask again, but that's what they get for asking.

On the other hand, they need to know that in the midst of all of those creaks and groans, you have joy unspeakable, peace like a river, and hope triumphant. Yes, your car quit. Yes, your

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mate is sick. Yes, your income is on hold and the economy's not. But this world is not your home, and the inconveniences we call calamities are only whetting your appetite for the real world: the world where sin and suffering and pain and death will be no more.

You may not be in tip-top shape here, but beloved, your God has met every real need you have, and the physical needs He hasn't met are to prepare you for a life of ministry and growth. In very real terms, "you lack nothing". And that is your testimony to those who ask.

The children of Israel were at the point of entering the land of promise. Moses was preparing them for the journey. They had been wandering for forty years. This generation had never known what it was to own a home, settle down in one place and raise a family, or even have a permanent address to get mail. They were transients. They wandered. Their parents had exhibited a total lack of faith, and they were paying the consequences. Moses, however, gave them an answer for the times when someone would ask them "How are things going?"

For the LORD thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of thy hand: he knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness: these forty years the LORD thy God hath been with thee; thou hast lacked nothing. (Deuteronomy 2:7)

What an incredible statement. There is your answer to those who ask you "How you are doing". Look at what it says:

- 1- God has been in the process of blessing you. (Even though your life has been typified by wilderness wandering.)
- 2- He knows what you have been going through. (He is acquainted with all your grief.)
- 3- He has been constantly and continually with you. (You have never for one minute been alone.)
- 4- You have lacked nothing. (We'll have to explore that one.)

Let's take it one statement at a time:

Statement 1- "God has been blessing you in all the works of your hand." You answer, "I beg your pardon?" I've been wandering for forty years. I have no new clothes, no new shoes, no house, no reliable transportation, and I've had to eat the same food from the same source day after day after day, and it's virtually

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tasteless. There aren't a set of Golden Arches within kilometers of us. Blessing us? What kind of blessings? Hold on to that thought. He's going to answer that question in a moment. The blessings involve physical adequacy and spiritual transformation.

Statement 2 - He knows what you have been going through. *"He knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness."* God is mindful of your suffering. God didn't lose His children in the desert only to stumble across them forty years later. The law of sowing and reaping came into play and God had to watch His children suffer because of their own free wills. It broke His heart. But He knew about their journey through the wilderness and led them each step of the way. He cared. He cared so much He could not intervene and deliver them from their own self-imposed sentence. As we will see in a moment, had he short-circuited their suffering, He would have bypassed their blessing.

Statement 3- "God has been with thee". Not only was He aware of all their hurts and unhappiness, He never left their side. Not for one single second of those forty years did God go on vacation from His post as their protector and deliverer. Not once. When the pangs of hunger gripped them, He was there. When the noise of enemy fire caused them to flinch, He was there. When the cries of dissension from within the ranks began to cause turmoil to seethe, He was there. God knew all about everything and never for one second left their side.

Statement 4 is the clincher. It says simply: "You have lacked nothing." We had better think carefully about that. From man's perspective, they lacked everything. They lacked a place to live, good food to eat, the respect of other nations, a permanent place to worship, a safe, permanent place for their children to play and learn, and they had watched their parents die one by one until all were gone. But they lacked nothing. What did God mean? For the answer to that question and a better explanation of the other three statements, we turn to chapter eight. There the children of Israel are ready to enter the land, and once more Moses explains what those last forty years were all about. Now it begins to make sense.

All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers.

And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy

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God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.

And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.

Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years.

Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee.

Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him.

(Deuteronomy 8:1-6)

God is about to do something incredible. In order for them to be a part of it, He had to first do something seemingly deplorable. The something incredible was for them to “live and multiply and go in and possess the land which God had promised originally to Dad and Mom”. They were about to live life on a totally different plane than they had known before. All of the grief, all of the pain, all of the suffering would be worth it all. They were going to see life as it was meant to be and see God multiply life the way He intended it as they inhabited at last the gift of the promise. Wow! Already the last forty years are beginning to fade into the background and the hope of the future is beginning to blossom into a portrait of eternal bliss.

But God doesn't want them to forget those forty years. Not the pain. Not the gain. He wants them to “*remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years*”. He's not asking them to dwell on the incidents, but to learn from the principles. There is a big difference. God, we will see, was the instigator of all that wandering and all those hard years. He had a plan, as He did with Moses, as He did with Abraham, as He did with Joseph. He had a plan to prepare them for the miracle of grace that awaited them in the land. The sowing and reaping of their parents' wrong choices set the stage and gave God the raw material. The desire of His heart to change them and use them gave Him the motivation. He says “Let me tell you why I did what I did.” Now, He begins to explain what seemed to them so deplorable.

He said: “I did it to humble thee and to prove thee, to

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know what was in thine heart whether thou wouldst keep his commandments or not” (verse 2b). God said these trials were God-allowed to first of all change their focus from things physical to things spiritual, and then to see if they had passed the test. Not just overtly. He wanted to know what was really in their hearts. It might be more accurately stated that He wanted *them to know* what was in their hearts. He already knew. God, remember, looks on the heart.

So He “humbled” them. The word “humble” used here comes from a root that means “to afflict” or “to weaken by affliction”. God had to take away the things that represented strengths to them to get their attention. How did He do it? “He suffered them to hunger and then fed them with manna” (verse 3). He allowed them to get hungry. He created a need. They wanted quail burgers with cheese. After all, isn’t that what a good God does? He gives His children what they want. God didn’t give them what they wanted, though. Quite the opposite. He gave them enough to sustain them but not enough to entertain them. Why? He wanted to test them and teach them. The test was to see if they wanted God’s best at the expense of anything else. The answer was “not yet”. They screamed and complained.

They didn’t like the texture. They didn’t like the taste. They didn’t like the lack of variety. They didn’t like the fact that they had to go out and get it every day. They didn’t like the fact that they couldn’t store it up and save it. They didn’t like the fact that everybody got the same amount and everybody got the same thing. So they “murmured”. They complained to each other and railed at Moses. God knew what was in their hearts. Moses and the people found out. A lot of self-centeredness and greed was in their hearts. A lot of materialism was in their hearts.

But God was not only testing them, He was teaching them. What was He teaching them? “That man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord” (verse 3). And there was no better school room than that wilderness, and there is no better teacher than God. The only way they could grasp the relationship between the physical and the spiritual was to lose their grasp on the physical long enough to realize that the less of this world they had, the more of God they knew they needed. And as their taste for “Big Macs” died out, little by little, the fact that a loving God would provide such a gift as manna placed the focus on God, and not on the manna,

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and when He spoke of a land of promise, they believed Him.

He still does the same thing. He sometimes has to take from us the very things we are sure we can't live without, in order to teach us that physical blessings have no eternal value except in how unselfishly we give them away. Sometimes we lose them through sowing and reaping. He lets our greed or our self-focus cause us to stumble over our own mistakes and reap the harvest. Other times there seems to be no earthly reason for it. A sudden sickness. A sudden financial setback. An unexpected rebellious child. We don't understand. We cry. We pray. We tell God we'll be good boys and girls if He'll just give back what He's taken or restore us or return to us what we think we lost.

Often those cries are met with silence. Why? He is humbling us. He is testing us. He is teaching us *that man does not live by those things, but by the Living Word of God*. The physical things we lost could be returned in answer to our pleadings, but we would still not have the eternal benefits He longs for us to have. So He waits. And He waits. It may not be 40 years, it just may seem like it. What does He want from us? He wants us to stop complaining and invest ourselves in the word of God. In *every word of it*. Not just the parts that make us feel better. In the parts that make us feel convicted, as well. *Every word* (verse 3). That, He says, constitutes real life. Until we learn that lesson, we ought to be grateful to have the manna He offers us.

And don't discount the value of that manna. It is what God meant when He said, "Thou hast lacked nothing" these forty years. They didn't have enchiladas, but they "lacked nothing". They didn't have vacations by the ocean, but they "lacked nothing". They didn't have new chariots or new anything, but they "lacked nothing". What does that mean?

It means they had all they needed, and God saw to it that what they had lasted. It was time to go down to Saks Fourth Avenue and buy some new duds. But guess what? When they got there, Saks had burned to the ground. It was time for them to make it to the mall and get some new Florsheim shoes, but when they got there the mall was closed for repairs. So God said He had an alternate plan:

Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot
swell, these forty years. (Deuteronomy 8:4)

I think God invented polyester a long time ago. I've heard of

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clothes lasting several seasons, *but forty years?* They had time to come in style and out of style and back in style and no one noticed. Before long, the more fashion-conscious Israelis didn't even think about wide ties or different length hems or double-breasted suits. Those things didn't matter any more. Why? They didn't have any choices. Without new choices, old things have new value. Even their shoes had "eversoles". Look at Deuteronomy 29:

And I have led you forty years in the wilderness: your clothes are not waxen old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot. (Deuteronomy 29:5)

"Resole Sam the Shoe Repair Man" went out of business the first year. The shoes not only lasted, their feet didn't swell. Dr. Scholl, take note. New technology? No. A loving God was taking His children through a course in Materialism 101.

The first lesson was: "When you don't have what you think you need, you have to redefine what you think you need based on what you have".

The second lesson was: "When you learn to do that, God will extend the usefulness of what you do have in order to draw you to Himself.

And the third lesson is: "Once you've learned to do without, you begin to look for more eternal things to rest the weight of your life on, and sure enough, you find it: 'every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God'".

Would they have learned that lesson had they simply continued with life as usual? Probably not. *So God let them get hungry; then gave them food.* Simple enough. But look at the characteristics of what He gave them; look at their "manna menu":

- 1- It wasn't what they wanted. No one would order it off a menu.
- 2- It only met their very basic needs.
- 3- It allowed no room for competition. Everyone got the same amount.
- 4- It was obviously from God. It fell from heaven. No one could share the credit or receive glory.
- 5- They had to go out and receive it every day.
- 6- It was a physical picture of a spiritual truth. This passage tells us that. The picture was of the word of God.

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The one who is making the “spiritual switch”, then, sees that, in the same way:

1- God’s word meets the basic needs of our lives, where real life choices are made. Like manna, it meets us where we live. It is the bread and butter of our lives. God’s word is like vitamins; it builds us up slowly over a period of time, causing our spiritual muscles to grow and our spiritual blood pressure to stabilize. Man wants to dramatize it and both use it and abuse it to say what he wants it to say; to meet wants rather than needs, provide physical promises at the expense of spiritual reality. God designed His word to make us grow. The foods that make us grow up and grow stronger are not always the glamour foods. They are life’s “staples”. So it is with the word.

2- We are to take it into our lives regularly, daily, and consistently, whether we feel like it or not. Manna was never meant to be a once a week “fix”. Neither is God’s word. It must be taken systematically, continuously, and appropriately to make a lasting difference. That isn’t legalism; that’s obedience. Here is what God said about it:

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. (Joshua 1:8)

God’s word is not a once a week time-release pill you take in a pew on Sunday morning. The prescription reads: “Take as directed.” And the “as directed” is day and night every day and night so long as you shall live. Anything less than that is ignoring the Great Physician’s orders and daring Him to make the medicine work when you won’t take it as ordered.

3- The most simple of minds can extract the very same truth as a genius when it comes to actual spiritual nourishment. This is a truth that boggles the mind of the natural man. It says basically that you can throw out the world’s concepts of education when it comes to spiritual truth. There is only one textbook, not thousands, and the IQ is not the factor in learning. In fact, that is why “not many wise, not many noble have been called”. God has called the “foolish of this world to confound the wise that no flesh might glory in His presence”. This incredible gospel is as available to a small child as it is to a seminary professor. It is as understandable to someone the world considers retarded as it is

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to someone the world considers a genius. Imagine what that does to the human ego.

God's word, like manna, removes the boundaries of the flesh and makes everyone equal when it comes to being fed. Some of the wisest people I have known spiritually have been those who have been handicapped either physically or mentally. They have at their disposal extra grace, and grace is all that is needed to grow spiritually and to have a ministry. Place the word of God in a mind that is less than adequate by man's standards and you have the potential for a showcase of grace that will cause the heart of unregenerate man to stand in awe. They may be handicapped, *but they lack nothing.*

4- Man's interpretations are worth nothing. God's Spirit must work it into the heart. The secret to the manna was not in how they prepared it or in the way they ate it. Everybody had the same diet and the same servings. It all came from God and it leveled mankind to a single place before a sovereign God. And so does His word. It doesn't have a set of absolutes for the aristocracy and another for the peasant. Everyone gets the same meal; everyone has the same promises and the same principles. Praise God.

5- There is no other food for the soul. It is the exclusive menu. One item on the menu. Manna. One choice. Manna. Sort of takes the glory out of what you choose, but it also takes the pressure off you, as well. Books about the word are not the same as the word. Tapes about the word are not the same as the word. Commentaries are only that: commentaries. They are man's interpretations of God's revelations. They may serve to help confirm God's speaking to you through His word, but they are not designed to take their place. The word itself is a light and a lamp. The word itself is alive and powerful and sharper than a two-edged sword. Books about it are not alive. Books that supplement it are not alive. Books with illustrations about it are not alive. They can be helpful, but only the word of God feeds the soul of man. Nothing else does. Even our teachers sometime forget that Brother so-and-sos interpretation of that principles or that prophecy only indicate one man's opinion and can cause us to reflect and pray, *but only the word itself can actually transform your life.*

Now, you and I can make these applications and perhaps others by simply reading about them in God's word. These guys,

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however, had to experience them to understand them. They had to get hungry, look up and see weird wafers floating from outer space, pick them up, eat them, and then eat them, and eat them, and eat them, seemingly ad infinitum. They thought the diet was boring and they needed something else. So often, beloved, so do we. And we, too, must be placed in the furnace where the fire escalates until we come experientially, like them, to see that only God's word can give us the eternal nourishment we need to grow into His likeness. That is precisely what the Psalmist meant in Psalm 119 where he said:

It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn
thy statutes. (Psalm 119:71)

If you use each time of testing or trial as a reminder to go back to God's word in greater measure, you are using it as God intended. He sent hunger so He could send manna. He sent manna to remind them that real nourishment only comes from one place. It is a common denominator in the Christian experience. The mentally challenged and the college professor both have the same interpreter. The professor may even face a stiffer challenge. He has to get his own intellect out of the way in order to receive real truth. The simple minded one can receive it for what it is: the word of God.

There is, however, an even deeper truth buried here, waiting to be extracted and applied. It has to do with how God met their physical needs while He was teaching them about spiritual truth. He supernaturally intervened in small ways, causing the forces of nature that would normally destroy or deteriorate their clothing and their shoes, for instance, to be held in abeyance, and for forty years they never had to visit a shopping mall or buy out of a mail-order catalog. Not one time did anyone have to pull out their Israeli Visa Card and charge a new suit of clothes or a new pair of shoes. Every day they awoke to a fresh wardrobe, though it was older than they were. And every season they unpacked their summer or winter clothes only to find they were *just like new*. I think that means that their clothes grew with them, too. Even as teenagers, God saw that they always fit. Now, *that's a miracle!*

Try it yourself for just one year. No tailor to mend what's ripped or torn; no dry cleaner to clean what spilled. They had the original ScotchGard. Stains just disappeared. What happened when they tore something? I think it mended itself. Don't even hint that this was not a miracle of the highest order. God was

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seeing to it that the natural forces of sin which cause deterioration and decay on this earth could not touch certain things in their lives for a season. Sickness and death were still a reality. That was necessary for the older generation to give way to the one who would be able to enter the land.

The effects of sin on “things”, however, was a different story. God was trying to teach them an eternal lesson. That needed an illustration in the physical realm that would approximate to their finite minds, spiritual truth. The spiritual truth was the abiding, everlasting nature of the word of God. It would never change. It would never decay. It would never wither and die. The grass would. The flower would. But not the word of God. So He, for a period of forty years, applied that principle to the physical, tangible things that once had so easily decayed and been destroyed.

The manna which had to be taken daily and which knew no intellectual or social boundaries, and the ever-adequate wardrobe which remained constant and adequate no matter what, were the precious Polaroid snapshots of eternity that a loving God superimposed on physical experiences even as they watched them develop ever so slowly for those forty years that seemed like an eternity.

They weren't going to get fancy food. They weren't going to get new clothes, new chariots, new toys, or new anything. What they had would have to last, because God wanted them to take their eyes off of things and look at His word until it so captivated them that the things of this earth indeed grew strangely dim. Their focus wasn't on what fancy restaurant they would eat at tomorrow, or even on what groceries they should add to their shopping list. The only item on the list was manna, and it would be hand delivered by a loving God, fresh daily.

Before long, manna wasn't the issue. God was. What was He doing? Why this “stuff” that fell from heaven? It was to teach them that *man does not live by physical bread alone, but rather by every single word that is found in that eternal treasure we know as the word of God. Every word.*

How did He get their attention to teach them that truth? He took away the very things they were clutching at; He removed them from the “rat-race” of life where they could, by striving, achieve physical and financial security. They had to live with old clothes, but He made them last. They had to live with a boring

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menu, but it never failed to arrive on time. They had to live with shoes that never got replaced, but they never wore out. In reality, they had nothing, *but they lacked nothing*. That was His reminder to them through Moses.

Let's go back to Deuteronomy, chapter two, then, and remind ourselves of what Moses was saying. He was saying to this huge "transients convention" gathered for a church service in the middle of nowhere, "Thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of thy hand." In other words: "You have just been blessed for forty years". They may not have been impressed on hearing that. How could wandering in a desert for forty years with no new clothes and almost no food be a "blessing"?

Well, they didn't have the beatitudes yet, but we do. We know that "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted". They had seen an entire generation die off before their eyes; eyes no doubt red with the stains of tears of mourning. They had to turn to God for comfort. As they did, they were "blessed".

We know that it is the meek and the poor in spirit who are truly "blessed". They didn't know that. So God allowed them to become nobodies so they could one day see God and inherit the earth. We know that "blessed" are they who are persecuted for righteousness sake. They didn't. So God allowed them to be hunted and defeated and mistreated for many a season that the great reward could one day be theirs, and the approval of God upon His people could one day be the banner that waved over Israel at last. And if you are passing through fires of testing in one of life's deserts right now, I would remind you, "Blessed are ye....". No, you may not feel like it, but you are.

The children of Israel were "blessed". They just didn't know it. Their blessing came at the hand of undesirable circumstances, unfavorable conditions, and unfriendly neighbors. They wandered, they worried, they were weary. But God knew all about it. *He knew their walking through this great wilderness*. They were not lost to God. In fact, the more troubling life became, the more dear God became. And so it is with you.

Thy God hath been with thee. You walk through that illness not alone. You wait those long, lonely nights, but not alone. You cry out in your sleep for help, and you may not hear Him, but He answers you: He whispers:

The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that

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fear Him and delivereth them.

(Psalm 34:7)

Which brings us to the final truth: No matter what you have been in or been through, *thou hast lacked nothing*. Nothing? Nothing. You may say, “But look around you. Look at that couple. They haven’t had the struggles we’ve had. Look at him. He hasn’t had the sicknesses I’ve had. Look at her. She hasn’t had the financial struggles I’ve had. Look at that group. They’ve seemingly skated through life on top of it all, while we have been beaten down and torn about and worn out until we can scarcely walk. How can I say I have lacked nothing?”

Beloved, not only can you say it, *until you say it you will never truly understand or appropriate the marvel of the grace of God*. You will walk along the edge of the pathway, but never enter the palace of the King. He said He would never leave you or forsake you. He hasn’t. He never will. He can’t. He won’t. Therefore, *thou hast lacked nothing*. He promised you to feed you from His word and reveal to you the very treasures of the Kingdom. He has. Therefore, *thou hast lacked nothing*. He promised you that if you confess your sins, He would be faithful and just to forgive you your sins and cleanse you of all unrighteousness. Never has He failed to do that. Therefore, *thou hast lacked nothing*. He guaranteed you an eternal home free from sin, sorrow, death, and pain. It’s still in place, waiting for your arrival. Wow. Indeed. *Thou hast lacked nothing*.

In the realm of the spirit, you lack nothing. And everything else is passing away. Therefore, in reality, *thou hast lacked nothing*. Tomorrow, or even today, someone may well ask you that ever challenging question: “How are you?” Now, beloved, you have an answer straight from the word of God. Circumstantially, you may not be on top of the world. But one thing is for sure: “Thou hast lacked nothing”. You have no real needs God has not met.

And you never will.

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For Further Study and Application

1- How do you respond when people ask: “How are you?” When you ask that question of others, what kind of answer do you expect?

2- Memorize Deuteronomy 2:7. Personalize it and pray it back to God.

3- Study the four statements made on pages 4 and 5. Ask God to apply them to your life.

4- Read Deuteronomy 8:1-6 carefully. See if you can find four key words that summarize man’s need and God’s plan.

5- Why did God let His children get hungry?

Why did God give them manna?

Why was the diet consistent, but not varied?

What does this say to you personally?

6- What do you think was significant about their clothes and shoes? What do you think they represented?

7- Meditate on Psalm 119:71.

8- Examine your own experience. Have times of affliction or pressure caused you to search out God’s word more thoroughly or more consistently? Why is that? If that were the only positive thing to come of your trials, could you honestly thank God for them for that reason? Do you? Will you?

9- Has God taken anything from you that you thought you couldn’t live without in order to teach you spiritual truth? Has He ever failed to meet your needs? What constitutes a need? Can you honestly thank God that through it all, “thou hast lacked nothing”? Will you do that right now?

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