

THANKS (BUT NO THANKS?)

by Billie Jo Warren and Carol Duerksen

KEY VERSE:

The rabble among them had a strong craving; and the Israelites also wept again, and said, "If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic, but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at."

FAITH STORY:

Numbers 11:1-35

FAITH FOCUS:

While in the wilderness, the Israelites received manna from God for their daily sustenance, but they got tired of the same food every day. They started to complain, saying they wanted the meat, fruits and vegetables they had back in Egypt. When Moses heard the weeping from the people, he complained to the Lord, saying he was sick and tired of carrying the responsibility of these people. God responded by telling Moses to appoint elders to help him take care of the Israelites. God also promised to send them quail—so much meat that they would literally be sick of it. The quail arrived, the Israelites gathered them all day and all night, and while they were still eating them, they were struck with plagues. They buried the dead and left that place for Hazereth.

SESSION GOAL:

Help the students practice gratitude for all that God provides for them.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

Students will learn about the Israelites' lack of gratitude and trust in God, and will list the gifts they have from God and their "gratitude quotient" for those gifts.

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Paper plates for each student, five bowls of pretzels, towels to cover the bowls.
- 2 Prior to class, set up five stations with a bowl of pretzels at each. Cover the bowls.
- 3 Print the questions on paper for each group or have them written on a chalk board.
- 4 Make copies of the worksheet for each student.
- 5 Pens or pencils
- 6 **Optional:** A song of praise to sing together

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (5 minutes)

Give each student a paper plate. Uncover the bowls. Tell the students "There are five stations of food. Help yourselves to as much of the food from each station as you want."

CONNECT: (10 minutes)

After the students have visited the five stations, bring them back for a group discussion.

Ask the following questions:

- *How did you feel when you noticed that all the food was the same?*
- *Did you complain? If you didn't complain, did you want to?*
- *Was anyone thankful for the pretzels?*

Say: *I provided food for you here today just as God provided food for the Israelites. Just as some of you wished for some variety in the food, so did the Israelites when they complained to God about the food that God was providing them. Let's look at what happened in their story?*

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (20 minutes)

Break the students in to groups of 3-4. Have each student read one paragraph then pass the Bible to the next student. If the student does not feel comfortable reading he/she may pass the Bible to the next person. Keep passing the Bible until the entire story is read.

Ask the small groups to answer the following questions:

- *What are some of the gifts in this story that God provided for the Israelites?*
- *Why do you think they complained?*
- *What happened when the Israelites complained?*
- *Why do you think God gave in and sent them meat?*
- *Why do you think God told the Israelites to only gather enough food for one day?*
- *Why do you think the Israelites stopped trusting God? Why weren't they grateful?*

APPLY: (10–15 minutes)

Ask students to fill out the worksheet.

Discuss their answers, allowing students to pass on any of the answers that they may not want to share.

RESPOND: (5–10 minutes)

Ask students to turn to the Closing Psalm at the bottom of their worksheet. Tell students that you will read it in unison, pausing after the word righteousness, and when you pause, they should call out items from their Top Ten list for which they are thanking God. When they are done naming those gifts, continue with the last half of the verse.

Optional: Sing a song of praise together to close the session.

INSIGHTS FROM THE SCRIPTURE:

After being enslaved in Egypt and then led out into the wilderness by Moses, the Israelites are now complaining about their misfortunes. They aren't happy with their life in the wilderness, and one of their biggest complaints is the food. There isn't anything to eat but

manna—a fairly tasteless substance that they combine with oil and bake into cakes.

Their complaining is so frustrating to Moses that Moses in turn complains to God about his being responsible for this huge group of unhappy people. God agrees to do two things: to enlist 70 more leaders to help Moses, and to send some meat to the Israelites.

The meat arrived in the form of quail—more quail than they knew what to do with. Each person gathered ten homers, which was about ten loads on a donkey—way more than they could eat or process for the future. The Biblical account says that at this point the people “with the craving” were struck with a plague and died.

THANKS (BUT NO THANKS?) • Student Worksheet

List the top ten gifts that God has given you.

10	5
9	4
8	3
7	2
6	1

Do you ever complain or find yourself less than thrilled with any of your gifts from God?

If so, what do you think you aren't happy with those gifts? Is it because it's not cool to be thankful? Or is it because you can always find someone who seems to be better off than you?

Go back to the list of gifts and give each one a "gratitude quotient" on a scale of 1-10, based on how much you express your gratitude toward God for them. (A number 1 means you never even think about being grateful; a number 10 means you are praising God day and night for it.)

What do you think God's saying to you right now?

CLOSING PSALM

I will give to the Lord thanks due to his righteousness,
And sing praise to the name of the Lord, the Most High.

—Psalm 7:17