



Thank you for your interest in A People on the Way—
an four-week study of the wilderness wanderings of
Israel and what we can learn about the church today.

The pages which follow include:

A sample sermon/class outline (5 pages)

A sample handout (4 pages)

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Living Out of a Suitcase

Move One: Read Mark 6:8-9, 11

This world is not my home, I'm just a'passing through
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue.
The angels beckon me through heaven's open door.
And I won't be at home in this world anymore.

In the year 1676, a poor tinker named John Bunyan was imprisoned in Bedford Jail in London. While there, he began to write one of the most famous books in the English language. His story was about a narrow road crossing steep mountains and perilous quagmires. There were giants and lions and fearful monsters threatening every step of the way. There were strange characters peopling Bunyan's adventure: Mr. Worldly Wiseman, Faintheart, and Lord Hate-good. But most of all, John Bunyan wanted to tell the story of Christian, who was traveling that narrow road, bound from the City of Destruction for the Celestial City.

He writes at one point in the narrative:

Christian . . . went forward sword in hand, feeling his way step by step. For the path was exceedingly narrow. On the right, there lay a very deep ditch, into which many had fallen . . . and perished miserably. On the left there lay a marsh so dangerous that even a good man, if he were sucked in, was never seen again . . . It was all so dark that, when Christian tried to avoid the marsh, he almost fell headlong into the ditch. He never knew whether his next step might not be his last.

Pilgrim's Progress was condemned at first as an idle tale not fit for serious people to read. But in time, millions recognized it for what it was—an allegory of the journey every Christian must make in traveling from this world to the next.

Now of all the pictures Bunyan could have painted to describe the Christian life, it is interesting that he should decide on a journey . . . that he should speak of the Christian as a pilgrim . . . that he should depict us as a traveling people.

But, of course, John Bunyan wasn't the first to do that.

- Jesus said, "The Son of Man has no place to lay his head." He was a man traveling a long way from home.
- The first Christians were called "strangers" and "aliens" and "pilgrims." They were a people who were passing through on the road to better things.
- Paul could say, "I would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord." He knew what it was like to live out of a suitcase.

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Move Two:

But you know, we are not very happy with that “journey” thing.

1. All that talk about pilgrims and not being at home in the world and suitcases—that’s not the way we want to think of ourselves, is it?
2. I mean, if we have to pick a metaphor to describe the Christian life, instead of talking about ourselves as a “people on a journey,” let’s talk more in terms of a “people who have arrived.”
3. Think about the people of Israel.
 - Sure, there was a time when they were wandering around in the wilderness, living in tents, not knowing where their next meal was coming from.
 - But there was also a time when they crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land, when God gave them a home flowing with milk and honey.

Why can’t we compare ourselves to Israel *in the land* rather than to Israel in the wilderness?

1. You know, there was still a lot of work to be done when Israel crossed the Jordan. Being a “people of the land” was a full time job!
 - a. They had to fight for their territory and divide everything up between the tribes.
 - b. They had to settle down, build permanent houses, plant their fields.
 - c. They had to establish their businesses, give their tithes, select a king.
 - d. It’s not all fun and games being a “people of the land,” you know.
2. But there are some real advantages to being a settled people.
 - a. Life is so much more predictable that way. There’s a sense of permanence. You can establish some kind of routine.
 - b. And you can live more comfortably when you are “in the land” than when you are “on the journey.” Oh, you may not get rich, but at least you can sleep in the same bed every night and accumulate a little furniture.
 - c. There is a security you can enjoy when you are at home that you will never find when you’re on the road. You can lock the door at night. You can put away a little money for the future.
3. Yeah! If we have to choose a model to pattern ourselves after, why not choose Israel in the Promised Land? I like milk and honey! Don’t you?!

[Sung slowly and reflectively]

This world is not my home, I’m just a’passing through
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue.
The angels beckon me through heaven’s open door.
And I won’t be at home in this world anymore. . . . hmmm.

[Shake your head, as if in denial of the sentiments of that song.]

Move Three: It's just too hard to live very long out of a suitcase!

Oh, I don't mind it for a day or two. It's exciting to take a trip every once in a while. But to live out of a suitcase for a year? Five years? Forty years!?

Think about what it was like for Israel all those years in the wilderness.

1. Every morning you woke up and looked out of the tent to see if the pillar of cloud was moving on. If it was, you had to pack your suitcases and pull down the tent and trudge after that cloud until it stopped again.
2. While you were on the move:
 - a. You didn't know where you were going, you didn't know if there was water ahead, you weren't sure what you would eat. There could be enemy armies around every corner, just waiting to pounce.
 - b. You walked through the heat of the day, breathing that choking dust kicked up by the thousands of people ahead of you on the road. You had to deal with squabbling children mile after endless mile. Sounds fun, doesn't it?!
 - c. At night, you would unpack a few blankets, spread them on the ground, and try to grab what sleep you could.
 - d. There were no showers, no toilets, no kitchens.

Why would Christians want to compare their lives to that, and see themselves as a "people on a journey"?

1. *Their* lives were full of uncertainty and inconvenience and discomfort.
2. *They* constantly had to do without and take risks.
3. They may have looked forward to milk and honey. But on the journey, they had to be content with bread and water.
3. I'm telling you—the only way they could *survive* the journey was to learn how to travel light, how to live with the hardships, and how to keep one foot moving ahead of the other when everything about them must have been screaming "STOP!"

Forty years of *that* must have seemed like an eternity. Yet Christians are being asked to consider their entire lives as a journey from the slavery of Egypt, through the wilderness of this life, to the promised heavenly home.

Anybody feel like getting off the bus right now?

Move Four:

Some people will tell you that we are in the Promised Land already . . . that the kingdom of God has already come . . . that when the church was established, the kingdom arrived and Christians arrived with it. They would convince you that our task is to be a “people of the land,” to set down roots, to build homes, to enjoy the peace and security that has been promised us, to defend our territory and sit tight until the return of Jesus.

I wish that were the case. I value permanence and stability and security as much as the next man. It would be so much easier to be a people who have arrived instead of a people who are on the way.

But the kingdom of God is more than the church. It is the reign of God in the hearts and lives of people. “Thy kingdom come, *thy will be done* on earth as it is in heaven.” I look at this earth, and I see a great number of people who have not submitted to the will of God. Has the kingdom arrived? I look at the church and see so many ways in which the rule of God is undermined and contradicted. Has the kingdom arrived? I look at my own life and confess that, though I want God to reign in me, there are still ways in which I do not allow him to be king. Has the kingdom arrived?

No, brothers and sisters, we are still on the journey. Oh, there are times when we are so near to the kingdom we can taste that milk and honey. And there are times when some holy wind blows from the Promised Land and carries to us the refreshing fragrance of what lies ahead. And there are times when, even now, we experience kingdom blessings and kingdom joy and kingdom rest.

But those are foreshadowings of what is yet to come. We are not there yet. We are still on the way.

Move Five: So why does it make any difference whether we see ourselves as having arrived or as still living out of a suitcase? Why should it matter whether we call ourselves a people of the land or a people of the way?

Because a settled life-style won't work for a wandering people.

1. If you are expecting milk and honey, you will have no patience for the bread and water that is so often our fare on the journey.
2. If you're counting on rest, you won't put up with the hard work and fatigue of the road.
3. If it's security you require, the risks and dangers of the journey will make you angry and bitter.
4. You cannot live in a tent with a mansion mind set. You cannot live out of a suitcase and expect to have every comfort. You cannot be a wandering people and live a settled life-style.

A traveling people require an ethic for the road.

1. If you and I are going to survive the journey, we must learn the lessons Israel learned in the wilderness: how to travel light, how to live with hardships, and how to keep one foot moving ahead of the other when everything about us is screaming "STOP!"
2. There is a "journey mind set" we must develop. It can be summarized in three words: faith, hope, and love. (Preview of next 3 weeks)
 - a. Faith—There is a level of trust needed for the journey that permits us to have certainty of things we have not seen. We live by faith, not by sight, so long as we are on the way.
 - b. Hope—There is something which allows us to "keep on keeping on"—long after we have grown tired and discouraged. That "something" is hope. Endurance is a necessary skill when you are traveling. But you will only endure if you know how to hope.
 - c. Love—We do not make this journey alone. There are others on the road beside us. We cannot survive the journey unless we learn to love, forgive, and encourage one another.

[Quote slowly and with feeling.]

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Living Out of a Suitcase

There is a world of difference between a people on the way and a people who have arrived, between people who are still traveling and those who have already reached their destination. Different things become important to these two groups; different values are held.

You can see the difference in the various stages of Israel's history. When at last they entered the Promised Land (when they had arrived), acquiring land, settling down, building permanent dwellings, establishing routine and stability, and defending boundaries became the order of the day. The time had come to enjoy the milk and honey, to reap the rewards of those long years in the wilderness.

But Israel was a very different people on the journey. So long as Israel was living out of a suitcase, following the pillar of cloud and fire, a very different life-style was demanded. To survive the journey, Israel had to learn to travel light, to risk venturing into the unknown, to live with transience and uncertainty and danger. Flexibility, not stability, was the reigning value. Though they looked forward to milk and honey, on the journey they had to be content with bread (manna) and water.

*Therefore we are always confident
and know that as long as we are
at home in the body we are away
from the Lord. We live by faith, not
by sight. We are confident, I say,
and would prefer to be away from
the body and at home with the
Lord.*

2 Corinthians 5:6-8

Which picture of Israel best fits our lives today? Oh I know we would prefer to be people of the land. We appreciate prosperity and peace, stability and safety. But, at least in the New Testament, we are spoken of as a "pilgrim" people, as people looking for a better home than this old world.

You cannot live in a tent using mansion values. You cannot be a wandering people and live a settled life-style. You cannot live out of a suitcase and demand predictability and permanence. Traveling people require an ethic for the road, if they are to survive the journey. Over the next three weeks, we will explore three values that are central to being a people on the way: trust, perseverance, and community. Or, to list them another way: faith, hope, and love.

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Study Guide

Our studies this week will explore the meaning of "faith" for a people who are on the way. Is "faith" a noun or a verb? Does it describe the content of our beliefs ("the faith") or our willingness to trust in God ("great faith"). For a people on the journey, the second kind of faith is critical. To trust God, to believe him enough to put your future in his hands, is the kind of faith required by pilgrims.

Monday

- Each of the following passages refers to "the faith" and seems to understand faith in terms of "what you believe." In fact, you might want to substitute that phrase for "the faith" as you read. What are we told to do with this faith?
Acts 14:21-22 (remain true)
1Co 16:13 _____
2Co 13:5 _____
Gal 1:23 _____
Eph 4:13 _____
Php 1:27 _____
1Ti 4:1 _____
Tit 1:13 _____
- Other verses also use the word "faith" as a shorthand term for the body of truths we have accepted and believed in. Read a sampling:
Rom 10:8, 17
Eph 4:4-5
2Co 1:24
Gal 3:23
2Ti 4:7
- If you were going to make a statement of faith, listing what you believed in, what might you include?

Tuesday

- What you accept to be true and what you trust are not always the same thing. You've known people who claimed to believe the right things, but were unwilling to trust God with their lives. (Look at James 2:19 for an example of this.)
- In the following passages, the word "faith" is used to talk about "trust." Here, it is not what you believe, but what you are willing to risk that is in mind. Notice how you can easily substitute "trust" for the word "faith" in these passages. But you cannot substitute the phrase "what you believe." An entirely different aspect of faith is being talked about.
Mt 8:5-10, 24-26
Mt 15:22-28
Mt 21:21
Ac 27:21-25
Ro 14:1
1Co 13:2
2Co 5:7
2Th 1:4
- Write down some of the things you trust God for. How does this list differ from Monday's?

Wednesday

- Faith (in the sense of trust) was critical when Moses led Israel out of Egypt. Israel would have to believe (trust) that God would be with her and provide for her on the journey. Moses knew gaining Israel's trust would be no easy task. Read the following passages, where Moses seeks "proofs" to offer the Israelites. Write the proof beside the passage.

Ex 3:13-18a _____

Ex 4:1-5 _____

Ex 4:6-9 _____

Ex 6:6-9 _____

Ex 14:10-13 _____

- Put yourself in the Israelites place for a moment. Life in Egypt may have been hard, but at least they had food and shelter. To leave all that behind and journey to a "promised land" entailed considerable risk. In the following passages, Israel regrets trusting Moses and his God. Beside each passage, write down what they are missing about Egypt.

Ex 14:11-12 _____

Ex 16:3 _____

Ex 17:3 _____

Nu 11:4-6 _____

Nu 14:2 _____

Dt 1:27 _____

Thursday

- Water . . . food . . . safety. Aren't those legitimate concerns? It is easy to ridicule the Israelites for their grumbling—until you look closely at their situation. Read the following three stories and reflect.
- Ex 15:22-25
What had the Israelites just witnessed? (vs 19)

How serious is "three days without water"?

Did the Lord provide?

- Ex 16:1-4, 11-18
How long had Israel been traveling by this time?

If they had been living off of the supplies they carried out of Egypt, how much was left?

Did the Lord provide?

- Nu 13:31-14:9
How serious was the threat faced by Israel?

Would God have provided?

Friday

- No Scripture emphasizes the "trust" aspect of faith quite like Hebrews 11. Read that chapter now and give the appropriate responses below.
- Write out the definition of faith given in vs 1. Do you see how trust is being emphasized here?
- How did Noah trust God?
- How did Abraham trust God?
- Focus on vss 13-16. These were people on the way, on a journey. Trust, says the writer, was vital. How did they exhibit trust in "the things promised"? How did that change their orientation to this present life?

PERSONAL
STUDY



Ok . . . What do I do now?

JB: Odd analogy, if you ask me.

Rosy: I didn't. What's odd?

JB: You know...this business about Christians being strangers and just passing through this world. It's like he's never heard of the Kingdom. Now that we're citizens of the Kingdom we're not strangers anymore.

Rosy: I take it you haven't read Peter lately. Or are you doubting the apostle Peter and the preacher too? See it says right here: *Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.* Peter says we should live like strangers here. Do we have to talk about this during the sermon?

JB: I know that! But maybe with Peter it was just a figure of speech. The preacher is talking as if we really ought to consider ourselves aliens here. I mean what would be the point? Aren't we better off seeing ourselves as citizens. You know, people who settle down, meet our responsibilities, pay our taxes, follow the rules . . . that's Christianity, isn't it? Not seeing ourselves as homeless wanderers!

Rosy: JB! People are beginning to stare! Hush! . . . But maybe you're right. We *are* Americans, after all. We're a part of this country and culture . . . we can't just pretend we're not. It only makes sense to live like regular Americans . . . we don't want to look foolish. Why should we be any different than anyone else? Cars, clothes, houses, toys . . . it's all a part of the American lifestyle. Just like going to church . . . it's the American thing to do. Peter simply didn't know how great America was going to be or he would have dropped all that *stranger* stuff! Why, citizenship in the Kingdom and in America is practically the same thing, isn't it?

JB: Hooboy . . . sounds different when you put it like that. No, they are certainly not the same. Once we forget this place really isn't home...it's easy to just kick back and settle in.

Oh, I'm sorry, brother Smith . . . Yes, she's a real talker all right. Rosy, you're just going to have to be quiet during the sermon!

Here's Your To Do List:

- Christianity is a journey. We are a People of the Way. But, often, the only way to tell if we're making progress is to look back at where we've been. Set aside some time today to *look back*.

Where has your spiritual journey taken you this past year? Can you see growth in such graces as *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*?

- What we *label* ourselves really does effect the way we act. If you see yourself as a *citizen* instead of as merely a *taxpayer*, aren't you more likely to accept your responsibilities to the community? What do you *label* yourself spiritually? A pilgrim on a journey? A soldier for Christ? An ambassador of reconciliation? Make a list of such designations and identify both who you are now . . . and who you would like to become.

Let the Spirit Help

Father, keep our eyes focused on the goal. Keep us from being distracted by temptation or the difficulty of our path or our failures along the way. May unity with Jesus be our goal. Amen



T A K I N G
A C T I O N