



Life Guide

applying God's Word to life

4th Sunday in Lent: March 14, 2021 The Peculiar Antidote: Look and Live

Numbers 21:4-9

4 They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; 5 they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!” 6 Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. 7 The people came to Moses and said, “We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. 8 The Lord said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” 9 So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.

1. Share your travel story with the most mishaps, roadblocks, detours. Why is it so frustrating when something is preventing you from getting where you want to go?

There used to be a half-hour detour on the trip to New Ulm that lasted for more than a year. Nothing like extra time on the unpleasant prairie of Minnesota. One time I also drove to New Ulm in a snow storm with one working windshield wiper. It turned a 6.5-hour trip into a 8.5 hour trip. But the Lord watched over us to make it safely there.

2. Check Numbers 14:32,33. The incident with the snakes happens near the end of the 40 years. Taking this into account, why is it easier to understand the reason they were grumbling?

It's easy to give the Israelites a hard time and a bad rap, but we'd have been no different after 40 years. We have a hard enough time bearing the frustrations of one road trip. I can't even imagine 40 years. It doesn't make it right or good, but as sinful humans, we can certainly understand why they grumbled.

3. From God's perspective, his children have been rebelling and grumbling constantly—at the Red Sea when they want to go back to Egypt, at Sinai when they worship the golden calf, at Kadesh where they are afraid to take the Promised land, at Meribah when they cry for water—while God has been faithfully providing manna, quail, and sandals that don't wear out. Why does God send the snakes this time when the people grumble?

It's not until God sends the snakes in Numbers 21 that we hear them breath any word of repentance. They've been rebellious and their constant grumbling is a good indication of a problem going on in their hearts. So God disciplines them, to bring them back to repentance.

4. “We detest this miserable food!” That's what they said about the miraculous manna God was blessing them with. When do you find yourself speaking in this way about the blessings God has given you?
Our hearts often need a reality check. We get fed up with tasks, coworkers, family members. We find ourselves wanting more than what God has chosen to bless us with.
5. The Israelites' favorite question is “WHY?” “Why bring us out here to die? When we ask God “WHY,” what are we insinuating about the way he is handling our lives?

We are indicating, or just flat out saying, that he is doing a bad job of handling whatever it is that is unfavorable to us. To ask “why,” in a demanding way is to insinuate that God isn’t good or that he’s holding out on us.

6. Sometimes God gives a better solution in answer to our prayers than the one we asked for. The people ask for the Lord to take the snakes away. How does he give a better cure than what they asked for? Think of a time God answered your prayer with something better than what you were asking for?

If God simply took the snakes away, all the people who had been bitten would die. But he gave an antidote instead so that bitten people could be saved. Sometimes I’ve prayer for someone’s health to get better. Sometimes God answer that prayer by giving a glorified and perfect body in heaven instead of health to our earthly body.

7. What was so peculiar about the cure that God gave for the snake bites? What does it teach us about faith?

This cure is strange because it’s not medical, natural, or logical. Anti-venom is now developed from the venom itself, but just taking an image of a snake is not going to do anything practical to save you. The cure works because God says it will work. That’s what faith trusts—that what God says will save us will actually save us.

8. For what reasons is “Looking and Living” so opposite of the way we typically like to solve our problems?

We typically try to solve our problems using the Rooster Cogburn method from True Grit. When the girl gets bit by the snake, he tourniquets the wound, cuts an X, sucks out the venom and spits it. We like to try to solve our own problems ourselves. But often we make it worse by doing that. God calls us to look to his Son instead!

9. What’s the connection between the Bronze Serpent, Jesus, and the snake bite of the Ancient Serpent? See Revelation 12:9 and Genesis 3:1, John 3:14-16.

The Ancient Serpent is the devil who has been leading the whole world astray. He deceived Adam and Eve, and when they sinned, it brought death upon mankind, like a venomous snake bite. But the Son of Man must be lifted up just like the Bronze Serpent so that anyone who looks to him in faith will live. Jesus is the cure for the deadly bite of the Ancient Serpent the Devil.