



Discover the Word.

from Our Daily Bread Ministries

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Episode #05 – The Land Between with guest, Jeff Manion

Brian: On this *Discover the Word* podcast, author and pastor Jeff Manion joins Mart DeHaan and Elisa Morgan for a series of conversations about what Jeff calls “The Land Between.”

Jeff: “The Land Between” is about these transitional spaces where you’re not where you were, you’re not where you’re going to be, but for a stretch of time you’re unemployed; going through a challenge with a child; an illness that you can’t shake; it’s the house that won’t sell or the property that you can’t seem to purchase when the market shifts. And so, you find yourself in this space in the middle, the land between, and it’s just difficult to navigate.

Brian: Yeah, and it’s really likely that with some aspect of your life. You are right now in the land between. And according to Jeff, this is a space where there is fertile ground for your faith in God to grow, but it can also be a place where your faith goes to die. So join the *Discover the Word* group as Jeff Manion helps us understand how not to just get through these transitional spaces in life but to thrive there when we’re in the land between.

[Music]

Brian: And welcome to *Discover the Word*, the small-group Bible study from Our Daily Bread Ministries. Mart DeHaan and Elisa Morgan and Bill Crowder and Daniel Ryan Day are the regular members of the group that you study with, and occasionally we invite guests to lead us in a study of a passage of Scripture or a topic that has been helpful to them. Well, in our next two podcasts, our friend Jeff Manion is going to be with us. Jeff is an author and pastor. He has been pastor at the Ada Bible Church in the Grand Rapids, Michigan, area for well over thirty years, and we asked him to take us through a study he’s done that uses the



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biblical story of the Israelites' journey through the Sinai Desert during the exodus as a way of helping us to see how God is with us and provides for us during times when we are journeying through unwanted and challenging transitional spaces in our lives when we are in the land between. Just Mart and Elisa are involved in these conversations with Jeff, and we're going to start in Exodus 3. So if you have a Bible handy, you can turn to Exodus 3; and we'll get going on this series about the land between. Let's listen as Mart and Elisa welcome Jeff to the table and then jump right into it.

Mart: Jeff, thanks for coming back. It's great to see you.

Jeff: It's so good to be here. It's so good to be here.

Elisa: Yeah, I've been looking forward to it, Jeff. And I think the topic is going to truly resonant with all of us. Unpack just what it's about and how you came to it, would you?

Jeff: Well, "The Land Between" is about these transitional spaces that we hate where you're not where you were, you're not where you're going to be, but for a stretch of time you're unemployed; going through a challenge with a child; an illness that you can't shake; it's the house that won't sell or the property that you can't seem to purchase when the market shifts. And so you find yourself in this space in the middle, the land between, and it's just difficult to navigate; and I think it's one of the most trying stresses we hit spiritually.

Mart: I can identify with most of those that you were describing.

Jeff: Oh really?



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Mart: But I think one of the most difficult times of transition is when a good relationship turns bad.

Elisa: Mmm.

Jeff: Ah.

Mart: It's when a relationship where you've just enjoyed the person and you've trusted one another, times together have been really good, and then the weather changes and . . .

Jeff: Yeah.

Mart: . . . and something happens.

Elisa: Oh yeah.

Mart: And all of a sudden there's this break . . .

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Mart: . . . and you say, it can't go on like this. But you don't know how it's going to change.

Elisa: I feel super vulnerable in that kind of a setting you're describing. I feel kind of foolish and naïve and like I exposed myself.

Mart: Yeah.



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Elisa: And . . . and maybe that relational transition applies those feelings to what you're talking about, Jeff.

Jeff: Right. Even if it's a close friend . . .

Elisa: You know, when we even transition . . .

Jeff: . . . is there something in you that feels dumped?

Elisa: Dumped and just exposed. I'm not safe anymore.

Mart: And sometimes I realize I've contributed to this.

Elisa: Yeah.

Mart: Either intentionally or unintentionally, but it . . . you realize, why did I say that?

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Mart: Why did I do that?

Elisa: And between the occurrence . . .

Jeff: Mm-hmm.

Elisa: . . . and the restoration is ick.



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Mart: Yeah, it's awful.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: Or in between the dissonance you experience and the evaporation of the friendship.

Mart: Right.

Elisa: True.

Jeff: Because not all of these friendships . . .

Elisa: Are restored.

Jeff: . . . can be reconciled and come back to the same place.

Elisa: Yeah.

Mart: They don't, and some don't ever come around again.

Jeff: Yeah. So, Elisa, have you ever experienced, other than the relational thing we just talked about, a transition that you didn't invite, that you didn't want, but you were there.

Elisa: Absolutely. I think I would refer to it as a time of waiting.

Jeff: Sure.



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Elisa: But I remember waiting for our first child through adoption.

Jeff: Wow.

Elisa: You know it takes like four and a half years to adopt . . .

Jeff: Oh my!

Elisa: . . . a child. It's like being dilated to nine for four and a half years.

Jeff: Oh my!

Elisa: You know, and in that time, I didn't really understand how badly I wanted to be a mom. I thought, "Nah, it's not that important to me." And so during that time, my heart's desires were revealed to me during that waiting time, that transition time.

Jeff: Okay, just pause. This is what the land between is.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: It's desert space.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: And so, there's a passage in the Scripture that, it's fairly well known, but there's something that we skip over. There's the burning bush story. God comes to Moses and says, "Now go to Pharaoh and say, 'Let my people go.'" Not Moses' people, God's people.



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Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: But it's that scene where there's this shrub that's like on fire, but it's not being consumed by the fire, and I just want to read a verse. In fact, Elisa, you've got your Bible . . .

Elisa: I've got it, sure.

Jeff: But if you can read that. Read [Exodus 3] verses 7 and 8 kind of slowly to us.

Elisa: "The Lord said, 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I'm concerned about their suffering. So I've come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.'"

Jeff: Okay, the last clause that you read, "I will bring them out of that land (the land of slavery) and into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey."

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: It didn't say anything about the desert.

Elisa: No, it didn't.

Jeff: It just said . . .

Elisa: Didn't say what you're going through.



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Jeff: “I’m going to take them out of slavery into the land of promise.” And the Israelites end up spending forty years in the desert, the land between, and so there’s this out of . . .

Elisa: Hmm.

Jeff: . . . and into, and often we’re not expecting the desert space . . .

Elisa: Yeah.

Jeff: . . . in between.

Mart: But there’s a lack of disclosure there then.

Jeff: Well, yeah, and the reason there’s a lack of disclosure in some part is because they weren’t supposed to spend forty years in the desert. Some of that was disciplinary and remedial, but it’s where they received the Ten Commandments, it’s where they build the tabernacle, it’s where the covenant is established between the Israelites and this invisible Creator, God. And so “I’ll take you out of the land of slavery; you’re going into the land flowing with milk and honey—and into the desert you go.”

Mart: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: But the first clause you read, Elisa, “I’ve seen the misery of my people. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers. I am concerned . . .” I just love that. I . . .

Mart: Again, this is the Lord speaking.



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Jeff: Yes, the Lord's speaking. "I have seen what's happening to them. I have heard. I am concerned." But then it's like, "I love you. I care about you. I'm concerned about you. Into the desert you go." [Laughing] You know.

Elisa: You know what is resonating with me is when Lazarus was sick and Jesus tarried. I think it's in John 11 . . .

Jeff: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

Elisa: . . . and He didn't go, and He tarried so that the glory of God would be revealed. And Mary and Martha and everybody else was so up in arms because if Jesus had come immediately, Lazarus wouldn't have died; and Jesus knows full well what's going to happen. That in between time for Lazarus was between death and a resurrection.

Jeff: And for the sisters . . .

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: . . . who are waiting and waiting and waiting, and it says somewhere in that passage of John 11 that Jesus loved Lazarus . . .

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: . . . and Mary and Martha. These were friends. He had had hospitality in their house.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.



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Jeff: Can you imagine that? I mean, Jesus is in your friend circle.

Elisa: Yeah, and He didn't come.

Jeff: And He had healed other people. The Scriptures talk about Him healing blind people and lame people; and you send for Him, and He hangs out for a few days.

Mart: And it doesn't make sense.

Jeff: No.

Elisa: And here's the same thing in Exodus 3: "I'm concerned about their suffering." And yet . . .

Mart: Yeah.

Elisa: I hear your point, they go into . . .

Mart: Why?

Elisa: . . . the desert.

Mart: So why are we here?

Jeff: When I asked the question about the land between, when you're talking about relationships, and, Elisa, you talked about an adoption . . .



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Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: . . . and I awakened on a November morning of my seventh-grade year to learn that my mother had been killed in an automobile accident the night before.

Elisa: Oh my.

Jeff: My dad was a church planter out in the Western states with five children—my sister was thirteen, I was twelve, my younger brothers were nine, four, and two months old.

Elisa: Oh goodness!

Jeff: And the two-month old baby lived through the accident that took my mom's life. So, I'd been raised in Southeastern Idaho up to age twelve, and following my mom's death, we moved to Michigan, to Grand Rapids, and my dad became an instructor at a Bible college.

Mart: Was there family here? Is that why you moved?

Jeff: His roots were here, but it was a school that he had gone to; he had been on the board. And so, he rapidly met a recent graduate and secretary, and he married Carolyn, who was twenty-one years old at the time, and she became my stepmom.

Elisa: Hmm.

Jeff: Carolyn is one of the most gracious people you would ever meet.



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Elisa: Hmm.

Jeff: She was an absolute gift to our family. But it just doesn't take a lot of imagination . . .

Elisa: Yes.

Jeff: . . . to see how going from single, twenty-one-year-old secretary to mother of five children . . .

Elisa: Mmm.

Jeff: . . . was jarring for her.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: We lived in Grand Rapids for two years and then moved to Sacramento, California.

Elisa: Mmm.

Jeff: And so . . .

Elisa: That's a huge change too.

Jeff: Yeah, beginning of my sophomore year, and so all of my upbringing in one stable place, all of my grade school years in one small farming town, and then one funeral, one wedding, and two cross-country moves later, everything had changed and then changed again. And I believe what was happening in that time was that God was softening my heart



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and preparing me to serve people who would be going through awful transitions that they didn't ask for.

Elisa: Hmm.

Jeff: When the wife is at home and the husband walks in and says, "I don't love you, and I'm not sure I ever did; and I'm moving out and I don't want a counselor." Or the man that's sitting in an office and his employer walks in and says, "Your position's been eliminated," and you're suddenly unemployed. Or the sixteen-year-old that announces to her parents, "Mom, Dad, I'm pregnant," and the family is thrown into the land between, into this desert space. And so, I believe that what I was experiencing through the seventh grade, eighth grade, and ninth grade was preparing my heart to lead and to coach and to just to love people well.

Elisa: Hmm.

Mart: Hmm. And that perspective, did this come recently?

Jeff: Mart, it probably came to me after I was pastoring, because I started preaching at Ada Bible Church, where I've been for the last thirty plus years, when I was twenty-one years old. And so, I then look back and go, "What in the world prepared me in any way to be able to shepherd people as a twenty-one-year-old kid?"

Mart: Yeah.

Jeff: What I think qualified me in any way was not the Bible classes that I had under my belt, but I think what prepared me was the tragedy . . .



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Elisa: Mmm.

Jeff: . . . that our family had gone through and just the realization that God could be faithful when life could be jarring.

Mart: So the empty space, the wilderness can make sense eventually.

Jeff: Eventually.

Elisa: There's a sense in which it's kind of God takes us to school out in those desert places. We didn't enroll. He . . . He just takes us . . .

Mart: Yeah.

Jeff: Well it's trust . . .

Elisa: . . . to school.

Jeff: . . . school. It's trust school.

Elisa: That's right.

[Music]

Jeff: And what I've come to believe about these transitions is that the space that we hate is often where God chooses to do His best work. The real estate, the desert that we loathe, is



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often the space where God grows fruit that I desperately, desperately need. And so I try to remember that now, and I try to love people well in their transitions now in just reminding them the soil that we despise often produces the fruit that we crave.

Jeff: Okay, a question, Elisa and Mart. What's the longest flight delay you've ever experienced? Stuck in an airport, stuck in a city, stuck in a place, just trying to get out.

Elisa: I've had an overnight one.

Mart: Have you?

Elisa: Where I had to go get a hotel.

Mart: Well I have too.

Elisa: Yeah.

Jeff: Okay, overnight plus.

Mart: Sure.

Jeff: So, you're thinking thirty hours?

Elisa: Maybe.

Mart: No, maybe eighteen hours.



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Elisa: I have a friend who actually got detoured into Iceland from Europe during 9/11, and she . . .

Jeff: Oh my goodness.

Elisa: . . . stayed there three days.

Jeff: My longest delay is fifty-one hours.

Elisa: That's long.

Jeff: I was trying to get to Israel. Weather delays in Atlanta. I couldn't catch the flight twenty-four hours later. Forty-eight hours after our intended flight, we climb on the plane. Mechanical malfunction of some kind. Sat on the plane for three hours.

Elisa: Oh!

Jeff: So, it was two days, plus a three [-hour delay], so fifty-one . . .

Mart: Uh.

Jeff: . . . hours of sitting someplace. Just one of those times where you're . . .

Mart: That is a long time.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.



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Mart: You know, I feel so for the people, though, who get stuck in an airport and they have no place to go because all of the hotels are full. You watch television and you see these crowds and you think, “Oh, can you imagine?”

Jeff: Yeah.

Elisa: Head on their backpack.

Mart: Yeah.

Elisa: Yeah, that’s hard.

Jeff: Yeah, [during] my fifty-one-hour delay, we went to a hotel, came back the next day, went back, went around . . . went to the Coca-Cola Museum, you know, and then came back again. So it was not bad. You know, hung out in coffee shops.

Elisa: And things you would never do.

Jeff: Yeah. Think about delays. There’s a story in the Old Testament of the Bible. The Israelites leave Egypt. You know that Moses comes to Pharaoh [and says], “Let my people go,” and finally they exit Egypt, and they go out into the desert. They don’t go straight to the land of promise; they go to the desert, what we’re calling the land between, and their God provides this food substance . . .

Elisa: Mmm.

Jeff: . . . that they ate breakfast, lunch, and dinner day after day after day after day.



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Elisa: [Laughing]

Jeff: And if my math is right, they have been in the desert in their delay, their airport experience, they've been in the desert for two years . . .

Elisa: Oh mercy.

Jeff: . . . eating this stuff, and they are sick of it. Now, Elisa, I'm going to start this verse, I'm going to read verse 4 of Numbers 11, but I want you to jump in. I can't just have you read this verse, you have to read it with a whiny voice.

Elisa: This is director, yeah, take one.

Jeff: Okay. I'm . . . I'm going to direct you. I'm going to start it.

Elisa: Okay.

Jeff: And then I'm going to stop and then you take over, but it has to be with a whiny voice or this just won't work. All right?

Elisa: Okay.

Jeff: Ready. "The rabble with them began to crave other food [other than the manna], and again the Israelites started wailing and said, . . .

Elisa: "If only we had meat to eat!"



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Jeff: Keep going.

Elisa: Oh. “We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—and the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!”

Jeff: Mart, how’d she do? Was that right?

Mart: You know, on a scale of one to ten, Elisa, . . .

Elisa: A two? [Laughing] I think I was more angry than whiny.

Mart: I didn’t hear enough anger.

Elisa: Not enough?

Mart: No, a little bit more this time.

Elisa: “If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—and the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and onions and garlic. But now we’ve lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!”

Jeff: Okay, they’re sick of this stuff.

Elisa: Just sick of it!



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Jeff: They have been eating this over and over and over again, and they are just, “Why can’t we have something else to eat?” Now, we’re talking about the land between, their desert experience, but we’re also talking about when we get stuck. That season of unemployment that is way too prolonged. A teenager that runs off the rails, and you go, “When is this kid’s heart going to return to God and to us, because right now family life is not fun, you know, at all?” And there’s something about complaint that seems to move in as an uninvited guest. It’s almost like we don’t have to choose to complain. We go through enough disappointing days, and there it is.

Elisa: Mmm.

Jeff: And so just a couple questions I think it would be good to talk about. One is, What is it about experiencing the same difficult situation day after day after day after day that naturally leads to complaint? And the other question is, Just how do you combat it?

Elisa: Mmm.

Mart: Yeah.

Jeff: I mean, what do you do to weed a complaining spirit out of your life when you do not like the space that you’re in?

Mart: I hear your questions. We’re waiting for something to happen and it’s not happening and we’re not getting the job, kids aren’t coming home. How do you parallel that with what they were going through in the wilderness?

Jeff: Well, the parallel might be the passage that Elisa whined her way through.



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Elisa: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Jeff: They remembered Egypt. “We remember the cucumbers. We remember the melons. We remember the fish we ate at no cost.” And so, this manna substance that they’re eating—have you read the description of it? It’s like little flakes that fall to the ground.

Mart: Yeah.

Jeff: And they would take it and they would grind it up in a mortar and pestle, right?

Mart: Right.

Jeff: Add some water, and it would make this mush.

Elisa: It’s gruel.

Jeff: Yeah.

Elisa: Yeah.

Jeff: When I was a kid—it may be wildly inaccurate—but I imagine oatmeal.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: Breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Or they would take it, and they would bake it into some cakes.



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Mart: Yeah.

Jeff: But they had the memories of Egypt . . .

Mart: Okay.

Jeff: . . . by which to contrast . . .

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: . . . the current food substance. So it's not like they were born with it, raised with it.

Elisa: It's all they knew.

Jeff: It's all they knew. And so when we're in a "land between" situation, if we have grown accustomed to relationships functioning, if we have grown accustomed to financial security, if we have grown accustomed to employment and all of a sudden it's ripped from us, we have our memories to contrast our situation to.

Mart: Okay, that's good, and we didn't have the anticipation of this time that we're now stuck in.

Elisa: We didn't choose it either.

Mart: Right.



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Jeff: No.

Elisa: I'm really resonating with the thought of having . . . I had a back issue at one point in the year. And my leg went numb, and then it went to pain. And I could barely walk, much less sit or stand. And Jeff, what you're talking about is, I would think back on when I was quite healthy.

Jeff: Yeah.

Elisa: And I could ride my bike, and I could walk my two 100-pound dogs, and I could do what I wanted to do.

Jeff: Yep.

Elisa: And I would be incapacitated and think, Is this the way I'm going to live until I die, not able to use my body?

Jeff: What . . . how long did you have the back pain?

Elisa: It was about four or five months.

Jeff: Oh my goodness. Okay.

Elisa: And I began to think, Is this my new normal?

Jeff: Yep.



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Elisa: And that's maybe what I think you're casting is that when we have lived one way in a kind of abundance of health or wealth or just control of our days . . .

Mart: Yeah, okay.

Elisa: . . . and that's removed, we know what we're missing.

Jeff: Okay, and it goes on long enough. And so . . . what I want to do is not when you initially had back pain, but I want to go to the first week, second week, third week. All of a sudden, you're at a month . . .

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: Then two months.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: And then three months, and then four months.

Mart: And we're losing hope at that point, aren't we?

Elisa: Yes.

Jeff: You're losing hope, but there's something that can rise in the spirit that just goes, "I'm sick of this."

Elisa: Mm-hmm.



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Jeff: Like the Israelites in the desert were sick of this manna. And I just hear a listener going, “I’m sick of getting to the end of the month and not knowing which bills to pay and which bills not to pay. I’m sick of visiting a mom in a nursing home that doesn’t even know who I am. I’m sick of falling asleep at night and not knowing where my seventeen-year-old is.”

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: And there’s something about the time that not just day after day, but month after month and sometimes year after year when something in the spirit just grows into a deep resentment over the situation as it compounds.

Elisa: A deep disappointment too. We know God has the power to change the circumstances around us. I mean, He could heal my back. He could give me a baby. He could change my child. He could take my mom home. And when nothing happens, that’s incredibly disappointing.

Jeff: Now, where your heart goes in that moment is very important. The Israelites, here, they weren’t just complaining about the cafeteria food. At the end of this story, Moses will say, “You have rejected God.” When they looked back on Egypt, they were basically saying that—Egypt was a land of slavery—when this uproar starts about the complaint about food, in essence they’re saying, “We were better off in Egypt. We were better off as slaves. We were better off without You.”

Elisa: Mm-hmm.



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Jeff: And when you're praying through a difficult situation and it doesn't change, and when God doesn't respond anytime soon, the spirit can be infected.

Mart: Yeah, there's almost a feeling I think at times as though our faith is working against us.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Mart: Because if we didn't believe that God could have gotten us out . . .

Jeff: Yeah.

Mart: . . . it would almost be better than believing that He could and He won't.

Elisa: Exactly, and I hear what you're saying, both of you said we can choose just to unplug from that.

Mart: Yeah.

Elisa: Oh, I don't want this kind of God. "If You're not going to do anything, then I don't want You."

Mart: And then our anger turns against Him. I think that's what you're describing too, Jeff, is becoming angry with God.

Jeff: Absolutely. I think that when we're in the land between, when we're in one of these waiting games, I believe the heart is at risk. I believe it is dangerous spiritual terrain to



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pass through, because the heart can move toward trust, but it also can move toward complaint. And, Mart, I've discovered that for me, I don't have to invite complaint to show up.

Elisa: Hmm.

Jeff: Complaint arrives as an uninvited guest. What I have discerned is that one of the best ways to evict complaint is to invite another guest into my house.

Elisa: Hmm.

Jeff: And the guest is trust. It's the voice that goes, "God, I trust you here. I don't understand this space. I don't want this space. I don't like this space, but I will trust you in this space." And when complaint tries to move in, it discovers that trust has taken the guest room and is occupying the empty seat at the table. I honestly believe that trust evicts complaint. They are incompatible roommates.

Elisa: Hmm.

Jeff: And one inevitably pushes the other one out.

Mart: And if a person says, "I'd give anything to trust. How do I trust?"

Elisa: Yeah, because I think sometimes we need stepping stones to trust.

[Music]



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Elisa: You know, something to help us get there; and I have a key. I think it's thankfulness.

Jeff: Hmm.

Elisa: When I learn to thank God even in what I don't have . . .

Mart: Or what He's already done.

Jeff: Hmm.

Elisa: . . . that's where trust steps in.

Mart: And for what He may be doing now, but I can't see it yet.

Jeff: Well, here's a question: In what way can a heart of gratitude combat this spirit of complaint that seems to be taking over my life?

Brian: Yeah, that is a great question we can all ask ourselves coming out of that conversation. Gratitude really can rid us of a complaining spirit, that uninvited guest that often takes up residence with us in our times in the land between. And throughout the course of these conversations, I think we're going to find that the group will have a lot more to say about cultivating an attitude of gratitude, because when we hear how the Israelites were constantly complaining, we think, "Yeah, couldn't they hear themselves? I mean, couldn't they see what they were doing?" But in the next conversation a chocolate chip power bar is going to help us see ourselves in this story. Find out how when this *Discover the Word* podcast about the land between continues.



Discover the Word.

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Episode #05 – The Land Between with guest, Jeff Manion

[Music]

Brian: You're listening to the *Discover the Word* podcast and some conversations the group had with author and pastor Jeff Manion. And Jeff has written a book called *The Land Between* that we have a link to on our website. Blending biblical wisdom, personal experience, and relatable stories, Jeff invites readers to look at those unplanned detours we come to in life as roads to transformational growth, because as He says, "This land between is fertile ground for our spiritual growth, but it's also a place where faith goes to die." So obviously, option one is better. You can find a link to order Jeff's book *The Land Between* when you go online to discovertheword.org. And now back to more of Mart DeHaan's and Elisa Morgan's conversation with Jeff Manion about the land between.

Jeff: So have you ever been in a situation where you had to eat the same food over and over and over again? A mission's trip? College days?

Elisa: I actually go straight to when my kids were young and they would only eat certain things, so I could only fix certain things.

Jeff: Like what? Kraft Macaroni & Cheese? I mean, what was their . . .

Elisa: Peanut butter, peanut butter, [laughing] peanut butter.

Jeff: Okay.

Elisa: And I hate peanut butter, so even the smell of it was really *oof*.

Jeff: Okay, Mart, any confessions on here?



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Mart: I think back in college days, you know, we were getting food, and then we were supplementing our food by going down to the corner store; and it was like we were eating the same stuff over and over again. My wife today accuses me of liking to eat the same stuff over and over and over—and I do.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: But there's a difference between eating the same food because you want to . . .

Mart: You're right.

Jeff: . . . and eating the same food because you must.

Mart: You're right.

Jeff: I mean someone going through finishing up a graduate degree and working a part-time job, and they're eating Ramen noodles over and over and over and they all taste the same and you're nauseated by the aroma, the texture, the crinkling of the wrapper, and someone says, "Oh, I love Ramen noodles." Well there's a difference between eating them because you get to . . .

Elisa: That's right!

Jeff: . . . and because you have to.

Mart: So you know what? I don't think I really have been . . .



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Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Mart: . . . in that kind of a situation of . . .

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Mart: . . . some people that just don't have the means, right?

Jeff: Yeah, I went there by choice for just a couple days.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: Nothing heroic.

Elisa: What did you choose to eat?

Jeff: I'll tell you in just a moment [laughing], but this is what I was trying to do. There's what I call the Manna Riots of the Sinai Peninsula. The Israelites have left Egypt; they're on their way to the land of promise. They spent a couple years in the desert. They received the Ten Commandments, built the tabernacle, but they've been eating this stuff called manna. And there's this point in Numbers 11 where they just erupt with complaint, where they go: "If only we had meat to eat. We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost. Also the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, the garlic, but now we've lost our appetite. We never see anything but this manna." I was preaching on that a few years ago, and I thought, "You know, I am totally out of touch with having to eat the same food for



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Episode #05 – The Land Between with guest, Jeff Manion

every single meal,” and so I decided as a four-day experiment only to eat one item just for four days. Not a week, not a month, not a year. And I chose a chocolate chip power bar.

Mart: Why did you choose that?

Jeff: I don’t know. I wasn’t thinking. I thought this is smart, smart, smart. I . . .

Mart: Did you love them at the time?

Jeff: I did not despise them. I didn’t choose a flavor that I despised. I chose a flavor that I desired.

Mart: Okay.

Jeff: So, yes, these were going to be tasty.

Mart: All right.

Jeff: All right?

Elisa: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yeah. Four days.

Jeff: Four days. Four days. Day number one, I get home. My wife, she can cook! My daughter was living at home at the time and they were making this Asian stir fry and the fragrance just, you know, filled the house. They sat down with the Asian stir fry. I sat down with my power bar, right?



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Elisa: Mm-hmm. Okay.

Jeff: Okay, I'm a disciplined man. This was going to be a good experiment. Day two, I get home. They're away. I'm home alone. I eat my power bar for dinner, and I sit down leafing through a newspaper and an advertisement for Taco Bell fell out. [Laughing] And as I picked it up, I began to look at the pictures. So it's only day two, and already I was thinking about other food. Day three, my kids had friends over and they were grilling hamburgers and bratwurst, plus macaroni salad and potato chips.

Elisa: Mmm.

Jeff: And so I sit down at the picnic table in back and I open my power bar and my daughter Sarah goes, "Come on, Dad, just tell the congregation you cracked up doing this." [Laughing] But I started cheating. I nibbled at a couple elicited potato chips, you know. A forkful of pasta salad.

Mart: Okay, so you didn't make it?

Jeff: No. I was starting to crack. Next morning, I broke up two power bars into a bowl and poured milk on them to trick them into thinking they were cereal. And that night I broke my power bar fast. About three and a half days, and it was miserable. So this is all I'm saying . . .

Elisa: Huh.



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Jeff: . . . is that you look at a text like this where these people are complaining about the food—two years of eating this manna mush or manna cakes—and you read it, and I think a first reaction is, “Those people are babies. I’d never do anything like that.”

Elisa: Hmm.

Jeff: And yet actually try eating the same food for a length of time, and, Mart, suddenly, I think, rather than placing yourself above the characters and looking down on them . . .

Elisa: Hmm.

Jeff: . . . suddenly if you remember peanut butter and jelly, Elisa, over and over and over, and if you went two years with nothing but peanut butter and jelly, suddenly rather than placing yourself above the characters, maybe you embed yourself with the characters.

Elisa: Mm-hmm. In the story we’ve been looking at, wow.

Jeff: In the story we’ve been looking at, and you go, “You know, given . . .

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: . . . the right situation, I might have been right there with them.”

Elisa: Yeah, absolutely. I totally agree. I am just like them. I’d be whining.



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Mart: Well I'm wondering if somebody isn't saying, "Aren't you kind of trivializing this story a little bit? Is it just all about the food? Is it all about . . . I mean, if they hadn't eaten that food, they would have died."

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Mart: They wanted to go back to the slavery. I mean, they were furious. They were at the end of their rope.

Elisa: They're about how they defined what's good versus how God was defining what's good.

Mart: Yeah, I know.

Jeff: They were in slavery in Egypt, they're heading toward not simply the promised land, but the promised land was called the land flowing with . . .

Elisa: Milk.

Jeff: Milk and honey.

Mart: Yeah.

Jeff: And they're between. They're in the land between. They're in the desert. They're no longer eating the food of Egypt, which by the way, Egypt was the land of slavery, but stuff grew there. The Nile Delta was fertile, and so you had cucumbers and garlic and leeks.



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Mart: Which is what they're describing.

Jeff: Which is what they're describing.

Mart: It's what they're longing for then.

Jeff: And they're headed toward the land flowing with milk and honey, but they're not there, and so this between space, which is often marked by sameness in our lives—the house that won't sell over and over and over—and so I think it's the sameness of again and again and again and again. Dealing with the situation.

Mart: Okay, so it's not only just the big stuff, it's the little stuff that can drive you crazy, right?

Elisa: Well and it's the uncontrollable. Sameness is okay if we choose it. If I like to have a piece of toast with butter every morning, that's my favorite thing to have and I choose it, yahoo. But if somebody's making me eat that, and that's all I can have and just accept it, it's dry in my throat. You know, we like our routines, but we don't like somebody else to choose them for us.

Mart: Okay. Yeah, and Jeff you made that point early on. There's a difference between eating because you want to . . .

Jeff: There's a difference between Ramen noodles . . .

Elisa: Yeah.



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Jeff: . . . eating them because you may, and eating them . . .

Elisa: Yeah.

Jeff: . . . because you must.

Elisa: Have to.

Mart: Yeah.

Jeff: And in the desert, this manna routine was simply getting old.

Mart: Yeah.

Elisa: What's the parallel today? I mean, we as followers of Christ, you know, who know God, who know we were in an old life and surely it's better to know Him than to not know Him, but we're not what we want to be yet.

Jeff: Yeah.

Elisa: How do we learn from this story of God's people in Numbers and Exodus and [how does it] help us with principles now?

Mart: Yeah, what's the point? I mean what's . . .

Elisa: Yeah.



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Mart: . . . the why?

Jeff: Well there's a point here, and I think a point is, number one, placing ourselves among the characters rather than above the characters. There's a tendency to open a story of the Bible and see people acting badly and pointing at them and going like, "I can't believe they're acting like that." And so I'm not just talking about the Israelites in the desert. I'm talking about Peter when, three times in one night (Jesus is on trial), Peter denies Jesus three times . . .

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: . . . in one night. I mean, the disciples arguing about who's the greatest, or back to the Israelites in the desert complaining because they don't have water. And there's a tendency to read the stories and to have an attitude which is kind of like, "I can't believe those people are behaving like that."

Elisa: I hear what you're saying, and Jeff, I want to just ask a question because the verse, we're in Numbers 11:4–6, it starts off with "The rabble . . .

Jeff: Yeah.

Elisa: . . . with them began to crave other food." I mean, the writer of this text is issuing a judgment on these people. That word *rabble*, I don't use that every day.

Mart: What does it mean?



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Elisa: Well, I asked Siri, and she said that it means something like a people in disarray and kind of disorderly, and so that's a judgmental term. The writer didn't say, "And the beautiful, precious people of God." It said, "The rabble."

Jeff: You know, it's interesting that the text differentiates there.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: It says, "The rabble with them . . ."

Elisa: Ah!

Jeff: . . . began to crave other food; and again the Israelites started wailing." And there is a belief that as the Israelites left Egypt, they're accompanied by a group of kind of "hanger-oners," and so it seems here that you could have group A and group B.

Mart: That's interesting.

Elisa: Yeah.

Jeff: Yeah, the "hanger-oners," but also the Israelites start complaining.

Mart: They follow suit. They pick up on it.

Jeff: They follow suit. Like with my power bar experiment, it only took me three and a half days to grow absolutely nauseous with eating these over and over again. I think a powerful question in turning to Scripture where people are misbehaving is "Where do I do that?"



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Not, “I can’t believe they did that,” but “Where do I do that?” And when I ask the question “Where do I do that?” it places me in a position of humility where I can recognize sin. I can recognize where my attitude gets really messed up; and that’s not the end line, that’s not the finish line. It then puts me in a position where I can come to God for mercy, and where I just need to recognize I need Jesus very, very badly day after day, week after week, year after year. But it’s an attitude of humility where I am then in a position to receive God’s grace.

[Music]

Jeff: When was the last time you had to carry a piece of furniture that was really heavy? Rearranging a living room or pulling deck furniture out of a shed?

Mart: Yeah, we did that a few months ago. Yeah.

Elisa: Did you?

Mart: Oh yeah.

Jeff: What’d you do, Mart?

Mart: We were repainting a couple of our rooms, and I had to get all of the old furniture out. We had to move them into other rooms, and we moved some of the things downstairs. There’s an old bed, it was a mechanical bed, you know, with the motor on it. It was so heavy!

Elisa: Wow!



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Mart: And I had to carry it downstairs. I never should have done it. I thought I was going to fall down with it.

Elisa: Mm-hmm. Mmm.

Mart: It was so heavy. It had so much steel in it and this motor as well.

Elisa: You felt your body giving way.

Mart: Yeah, and I had it roped together, but it started to come apart; and I really thought it was going to go down the stairs, I was going to go under it, or I was going to tear up the wall. I was going to ruin the bed. I mean, something bad is going to happen. [Laughing]

Jeff: Grab that emotion. I want you to read Numbers 11:14.

Mart: Okay, 14. It says, “I can’t carry all these people by myself; the load is far too heavy.”

Jeff: Okay, the speaker is Moses. Moses who leads the Israelites out of Egypt and toward the land of promise. He’s in the middle of this complaint session where they are complaining about not having better food to eat because they’re eating this manna. Moses has a meltdown.

Elisa: Hmm.

Jeff: And you just read part of his prayer where he’s venting to God. He goes, “I cannot carry all these people by myself . . .



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Mart: Hmm.

Jeff: . . . The burden is too heavy for me.” I wonder if it’s anything like you carrying that bed downstairs where you think this is going to knock me over. [Laughing]

Elisa: Take me down.

Mart: Something bad is going to happen. Yeah.

Jeff: And take me under. But, Elisa, let’s do something. Let’s go back up to verse 11 and read the whole prayer, because Moses, he’s exhausted, he is so beyond tired. This is one of the most honest prayers . . .

Elisa: Mmm. Mmm.

Jeff: . . . you will ever read. So maybe start reading in verse 11; and I’ll just kind of break it up and stop us as we move through along the way.

Elisa: “He asked the Lord, ‘Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me?’”

Jeff: Okay, again, “the burden of these people.” It’s this weight that he can’t carry. “What did I do to make you so angry that you would give me this responsibility?”

Mart: And the people are complaining.



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Jeff: It says that the people, everyone, was at the door of their tent wailing, and so it's an absolutely uncontrollable situation; and this is not the first time something like this has happened. And so, this is not round one. This is round fifteen.

Elisa: It goes on in verse 12, "Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their ancestors?"

Jeff: He uses childcare language.

Elisa: Oof!

Jeff: It's a bunch of babies. "Are these my kids?"

Elisa: But he also uses parental language; and any parent listening knows how heavy . . .

Jeff: Yeah.

Elisa: . . . children are, and you can never put them down.

Jeff: So, Mart, jump in with verse 13. It's the complaint about the manna and not having any other food.

Mart: Okay. "Where am I supposed to get meat for all of these people? They keep whining to me saying, 'Give us meat to eat!' I can't carry all these people by myself. The load is far too heavy."



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Jeff: And if we think the word *emotional meltdown* is too strong for what Moses is experiencing, the last verse, Numbers 11:15, says, “If this is how you’re going to treat me, please go ahead and kill me—if I have found favor in your eyes—and do not let me face my ruin.” Dear God, I have one request, if you love me, kill me now! [Laughing]

Mart: And the New Living Translation says, “Do me a favor and spare me the misery.”

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: Yeah.

Mart: Yeah.

Jeff: So what’s Moses experiencing here? Try to put words to this.

Elisa: Oh, he’s at the end of himself. He is done. He is spent. His tank is on empty. There is nothing left.

Jeff: Nothing left. Mart, what’s he experiencing here?

Mart: He’s tired, he’s angry. Way over his head.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: Okay. His use of the term, “It’s too heavy. I can’t carry this anymore.” Let’s turn from Moses and think about the experiences of some of our listeners. Who can we imagine



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saying, “Jeff, Mart, Elisa, this is too heavy. I can’t carry this anymore”? What kind of situations do we carry?

Elisa: The first one I go to, because it’s so literal for me, Jeff, is just a little a while ago my daughter was in a very high-risk pregnancy. She had already lost one baby . . .

Jeff: Hmm.

Elisa: . . . at twenty-two weeks, just huge grief, and gets pregnant again and then goes into what’s called preeclampsia, where it’s either the baby or her. The baby’s fighting her body . . .

Jeff: Agh!

Elisa: . . . and we found ourselves in the hospital with her for weeks trying to keep the baby where it needed to be in order to be born at an appropriate time, and, you know, it’s interesting because like six to eight weeks later is when I began to have problems with my back.

Jeff: Agh.

Elisa: The baby had been delivered but was in the NICU, my little grandson was in the NICU, and I was going back and forth and back and forth and doing my own ministry and work responsibilities, but trying to care for my daughter and her eleven-year-old son as well as, you know, now this new one. And it’s funny because when I began to have trouble with my back, somebody asked me, “Have you been carrying something heavy emotionally?”



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Jeff: Oh.

Elisa: And I went “Oh my word!” and it’s like when I let it go—I mean, there’s nothing I could do; the baby was born, we had to just let him grow and get healthy into an appropriate weight—my back went out, and I really prayed about that, Jeff and Mart, and began to realize I had been carrying something myself . . .

Jeff: But if . . . if there was a situation . . .

Elisa: . . . too heavy for me. Mm-hmm.

Jeff: . . . where you could look at that verse and quote Moses and . . .

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: . . . go, “I cannot carry this; the burden is too heavy for me,” it was the situation with your daughter, the baby—very real.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: And you’re still carrying everything else at the same time.

Elisa: Right.

Jeff: Mart, can you think of a time where you were, “Man, this is just too heavy. I can’t carry this anymore”? Either yourself or . . .



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Elisa: Yeah.

Jeff: . . . someone, a friend's [struggle] that you observed.

Mart: Oh, I've, you know, wherever you've got a family where the relationships are breaking down . . .

Jeff: Yeah.

Mart: . . . and family members realize they can't control the other. It's the children can't control the parents or the parents can't control the children. Then all of a sudden where there's pressure in one spot, anger shows up, fear. And it doesn't get resolved in a month, and then it doesn't get resolved in a year, and then after a while, people in those kinds of situations, it's just like there's a sense of despair and fear and it's almost like, "Lord, put me out of my misery."

Elisa: Mmm.

Jeff: Yeah.

Mart: We're carrying a weight through life. Yeah.

Jeff: Isn't it interesting how we use the word *heavy*.

Mart: Yeah.



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Jeff: College graduates say, “Yeah, I graduated with heavy student loans.” And then you graduate from a university or college, and if you have heavy student loans and you can’t find a job in your chosen field that matches: “This is too heavy. I can’t carry this anymore.”

Elisa: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Jeff: I think of people who have something wrong physically, and they have test after test after test with no clear diagnosis. “It’s too heavy, I can’t carry it anymore.” I think of business owners. The business shrivels from twelve employees down to four, and the company . . .

Elisa: Agh.

Jeff: . . . it took a dozen years to build has evaporated in two years, and there just comes one more conversation as you begin to think about what assets to sell off. “Heavy! I can’t carry this anymore.”

Elisa: Mm-hmm. Or a mom with a special needs child.

Jeff: Oh my!

Elisa: Or a couple going through divorce or somebody’s been evicted.

Jeff: Yeah.

Elisa: I mean, you can go on and on.



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Jeff: I love the fact that in Numbers 11:14, we have the imagery of carrying a weight. Mart, just like walking down the stairs with this bed: You're losing your grip. You think it's going to knock you over. But this is a prayer. Moses is venting this to God. He's praying this, and some of these words are so brutally honest. "Why have you brought all this trouble on your servant? You put all the burden of all the people on me. I cannot carry these people by myself. The burden is too heavy for me." I just got a question. Is that kind of prayer legal?
[Laughing]

Elisa: Oh, wow, I love that it's in Scripture. I love it, Jeff. It so freeing to see Moses, a man I have learned to respect greatly, be so human before God; and he's still standing there, and he keeps on going. He isn't struck dead. I mean God is actually listening. He's still alive saying these things.

Mart: It's interesting, isn't it, because in so many ways Moses, the man of the mountain of God's presence, he's bigger than life, and yet here he becomes very much like us.

Elisa: And later he does get in trouble for his anger, but . . .

Mart: Yeah.

Elisa: . . . in this moment, it's as if this is okay to talk this way, to feel this way.

Jeff: It is important to remember that in our moments of emotional fatigue that we can come to God with open hands and just go, "I am so messed up. I am so beyond exhaustion, and I don't know why you've given me this responsibility." Remember, Moses didn't apply for this job.



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Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Mart: Hmm.

Jeff: He gets recruited. He tried to avoid it, and he says, “Yeah, this is exactly the kind of thing that I thought was going to happen.” Is there something to learn here simply by his honesty with God?

Elisa: You’re making me hungry for what’s next, Jeff.

Jeff: Well . . .

Elisa: I want to see how God responds.

Mart: Yeah, we want to know what’s the outcome, right?

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: Yeah.

Mart: What happens when you’re this honest with God?

Jeff: Well for now, just see that Moses comes, and he opens his hands and he doesn’t hold anything back; and I think it’s an act of trust, because he’s keeping the dialogue open. He doesn’t complain about God. He pours out his frustration to God.

[Music]



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Jeff: And so he's at least in the conversation, and the fact that he's speaking will invite God to speak back. And so our listeners who just went "Oh my goodness, that's me! This is too heavy. I can't carry this anymore," I would just encourage . . . don't just think that. Open up your heart to God and say, "This is where I am, and it's a mess." Come to God with open hands to carry in all of the pain, all of the exhaustion, all of the frustration, but keep your hands open to receive any good gift that God may be pleased to place in those open hands. He may choose to meet you in the middle of that mess.

Brian: You're listening to the *Discover the Word* podcast. Mart DeHaan and Elisa Morgan are talking with our guest Jeff Manion about what he's calling the land between. And so we've been seeing how complaining seems to be a pretty common response to being in the land between. The Israelites grumbled a lot. But in that conversation, Moses sounded like he was complaining too, and they didn't seem to be as critical of Moses. So what's the difference? Well we'll explore that after this word.

[Music]

Brian: On the next *Discover the Word* podcast . . .

Jeff: I believe that the land between is fertile ground for transformational growth. I believe the land between is also the space where faith goes to die.

Elisa: Hmm.

Jeff: And I think the decisions made in that desperate space help determine the person I'm becoming.



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Episode #05 – The Land Between with guest, Jeff Manion

Brian: Jeff Manion returns for part 2 of these conversations about Israel’s experience and our experience in the land between. So what is it that makes the land between a place where our faith grows rather than withers up and dies?

Jeff: “Will you trust me?” I think it’s the question that God was asking of them.

Elisa: Hmm.

Jeff: And I think that when we travel through the desert, when we hit the land between—whether it’s health, whether it’s vocation, whether it’s challenges with family—I think it’s something God has wanted from the very beginning: “Oh, I so much want you to trust Me!”

Brian: Part 2 of “The Land Between” with Jeff Manion on the next *Discover the Word* podcast.

Mart: Jeff, we’ve had some good conversations about Israel in the wilderness, but we’ve got a question.

Jeff: All right.

Mart: We’ve got a question about the last two conversations we’ve had.

Elisa: Yeah, because I’m really hearing you. We’ve been looking at the Israelites and how tacky they were for complaining about God, you know, I just have manna—and you know they used to be in slavery, and they forget all about it.



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Episode #05 – The Land Between with guest, Jeff Manion

Mart: But when Moses complains to God, in our last conversation, you were saying what a wonderful thing that he . . .

Elisa: That he could be that honest with God.

Mart: Yeah, that he could have that courage, transparency.

Jeff: Okay, let me isolate that question. The Israelites have been in the desert for two years. They're complaining about eating this manna day after day, and it seems that their complaint is something despicable . . .

Elisa: Hmm.

Jeff: . . . in the story. Then Moses turns around and he vents this prayer to God. He goes, "Ah, why did you put the burden of all of these people on me? This is too heavy. I can't carry this anymore."

Mart: "Take me out of my misery."

Jeff: "If this is how you're going to treat me, put me out of my misery right now." So a question, Why don't they get away with it, and why does he?

Elisa: Exactly.

Jeff: I mean what's the difference between their complaint and his complaint?

Elisa: Right.



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Episode #05 – The Land Between with guest, Jeff Manion

Mart: Okay, that's the question.

Jeff: Okay. I think it's different because I believe that they are complaining about God, and I believe that he is venting to God. His is a prayer. Theirs is just griping. That is a distinction that is an important difference. Elisa, one of your friends is griping to her girlfriends about her husband and what her husband does and what her husband doesn't do, what her husband says he's going to do and doesn't do.

Elisa: Right.

Jeff: There's a difference between that—complaining to your girlfriends—and the same woman who goes home, closes the door to her bedroom, kneels down by the bed and goes, “God, I can't take this anymore.”

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: “This isn't what I thought marriage was going to be. This isn't what I thought parenting was going to be. I didn't ask for any of this.” I think the fact that one of them is a complaint session and one of them is venting to God, I think that's huge.

Elisa: Hmm. That's helpful.

Jeff: And the Israelites are . . .

Mart: Okay.



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Jeff: . . . complaining about their food. But just the fact that Moses is saying, “God, I can’t carry this anymore,” it seems that he’s open to conversation with God and it kind of makes that different than simply complaining about our circumstances.

Mart: Okay, I hear you now, because the Israelites were actually talking about going back to Egypt.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: Well they’re remembering the food they had in Egypt. “We remember the cucumbers. We remember the garlic. We remember all the fish we ate.”

Mart: Kind of like wishing to go back.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: Well it was like, “We were better off as slaves. We were better off with Egypt.” And by inference, “God, we were better off without You.”

Elisa: Yeah.

Jeff: But here’s Moses, and it’s one of the most honest prayers. The prayer in Numbers 11 where Moses says, “I can’t carry this. It’s too heavy for me.” I think it provides a model for how to pray when we are absolutely exhausted and do not know how to pray.

Mart: That’s good.



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Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: And it's not the only one of these in the Bible.

Elisa: Right.

Jeff: I mean, literally. Theologians have this term around it, and it's called *lament*, and lament is the kind of prayer that *isn't* the psalm that goes, "Oh, God, I praise you for all that you've done and your majesty in the world." It's the kind of prayer that David prays in Psalm 22, where he says—now listen to this for honesty— "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me? So far from the words of my groaning. Oh, my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer. By night, and am not silent." It seems that David is going like, "God, I just want to know why. Why do I keep praying? And why do You keep not doing anything?"

Elisa: Hmm. Hmm.

Jeff: And so Moses' prayer in Numbers 11, it's not the only time in Scripture . . .

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: . . . that someone offers up a lament, a prayer of lament, and they just go, "This isn't working; and I'm praying and you're not responding." Psalm 13 is very similar. King David, four times he asks the same question. And the question is "How long? How long, oh Lord, will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts, and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?" This is a guy who was beat up over time; but again, this is a



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prayer to God. He's approaching God. He's facing God. He's pouring out his heart to God. It seems that the door is closed, and he goes, "How long am I going to have to deal with this situation?"

Elisa: So this differentiation between complaining about God versus opening our broken heart, coming to the end of ourselves and letting all those emotions out before God.

Mart: Yeah.

Elisa: The one, the only one, who can really make a difference in our situation.

Mart: Yeah, rather than saying, "Guys, you know, I've tried this faith thing. I'm out of here."

Elisa: Yeah.

Jeff: Well there's language that I use, and I don't know if it's helpful for anybody else, but for some reason it resonates with me. I ask the question, "Jeff, which direction are you facing? Are you facing God and addressing God, or is your back turned and are you simply complaining about life?" And I think if I'm facing God and bringing my challenges to God, somehow that feels different to me than turning my back to God and just simply complaining about the circumstances to other people.

Mart: Well, you know, there're parallels in our own human relationships.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: Yes.



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Mart: When we stay engaged and deal with issues rather than saying, “I’m out of here.”

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Mart: We’ve all lived long enough to know that very difficult issues can come up in our lives, and we either face them and work through them together, or we run.

Jeff: Yeah. When you liken this to personal relationships in your leadership role of Our Daily Bread Ministries over the years, there’s a difference between someone being disappointed with a decision and coming to you and someone being disappointed with a decision and talking about you in the breakroom. That’s massive!

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Mart: That’s huge.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Mart: Yeah, and any one of us on each side of the issues can do it.

Elisa: And it deeply affects the entire ministry, church, community, family, body of Christ, you know, . . .

Jeff: Yeah. Yeah.



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Elisa: . . . if we are complaining within rather than appropriately taking our beefs to the source. We're causing dissention.

Mart: Right.

Elisa: We're causing more problems.

Mart: There's only one way to forward . . .

Elisa: Yeah.

Mart: . . . together. Yeah.

Jeff: And I'm not saying it's comfortable when someone comes in, closes the door, and goes, "Jeff, I think you're mismanaging this." I'm saying that I would much prefer someone coming in, closing the door, and going, "What were you thinking?" than learn they have circulated that complaint around the organization. I mean, Moses' prayer . . .

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: "Why have you put the burden of all these people on me? I can't carry them anymore." I believe that in this genre that is called lament, either expressed or implied, there's the idea of hope. There's the idea that God may act, that God may intervene, that God may provide. Now in the Psalms—Psalm 13 and Psalm 22 that I alluded to—it's expressed.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.



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Jeff: I mean it's verbalized in that one word. David goes, "How long, how long, how long will I wrestle with my thoughts?" Just verses later, David says, verse 5 of Psalm 13, "But I will trust in your unfailing love. I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me." And so even within this short six-verse song, this psalm, this prayer, David says, "How long, oh, Lord?" but yet "Man, I'm going to trust you here. I will trust in your love." He's anchored in the past.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: He says, "The Lord has been good to me." And so undoubtedly there've been times in the past where David was frustrated, confused, hurt, and yet he had seen God provide. And so expressed there is "I'm in the middle of this mess. I keep praying. You keep not doing anything. And yet God, please, please come to my aid here. Please give me direction. Please help me."

Elisa: The Israelites complained against God, as you said, Mart, but a lament is what Moses offered in His prayer in Numbers 11. And a lament contains trust and hope and a conversation, whereas the Israelites complained against God and were going to take things into their own hands, "I'm going back to slavery."

Jeff: Even if it's a sliver of trust.

Elisa: Yes, so even a sliver, but it opens to . . .

Jeff: Yeah.



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Elisa: “Please take this away from me, or kill me.” So, in other words, Moses still yielded control to God; whereas, in the complaint department, the Israelites were really assuming control. Is that part of this whole concept of lament? And I wonder, too, if we might read Moses’ words one more time and just hear these principles.

Jeff: Yeah, Elisa, why don’t you read his prayer in Numbers 11, starting a few words into verse 11.

Elisa: Okay. “Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you would put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land that you promised on oath to their ancestors? Where could I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, ‘Give us meat to eat!’ I cannot carry all these people by myself. The burden is too heavy for me.”

Jeff: Okay. Moses does not expressly state in this meltdown prayer, “Yet I will trust in you.” Right, as David did in some of his psalms . . .

Elisa: Right.

Jeff: But I think the hope for intervention is implied.

Mart: The very fact that he’s speaking to God.

Jeff: Oh, the very fact that he’s facing God and going like, “I can’t believe I’ve got to deal with this!” I think it opens the door for him to receive the provision that God will bring.



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There's something about these people—Moses, David—these are not spiritual lightweights. These are spiritual heavyweights.

Elisa: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: I think that their ability to pour out their hearts to God like this is not a symptom of their immaturity, but their maturity. I think it coaches us in how to come to God, laying out our frustration when we are absolutely exhausted. It opens the heart to relieve, and it opens the heart to receive.

[Music]

Brian: Yeah, an important lesson for us to take away from this first half of our conversation with Jeff Manion about the land between is it's not necessarily a sign of weakness when we admit our helplessness to God. Actually, it's a sign of strength to take our frustration to God when we're in the land between. Mart DeHaan and Elisa Morgan will pick up these conversations with author and pastor Jeff Manion in our next *Discover the Word* podcast. *Discover the Word* is a small-group Bible study from Our Daily Bread Ministries in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in which we invite you to walk with us through topics and passages that inform the way we read the Scriptures, challenge us as we live our lives as followers of Christ, and always point us to discover Jesus in the pages of the Bible. We encourage you to explore other studies with the group on our discovertheword.org website. And thanks for remembering that it is listeners like you who make *Discover the Word* possible. Your financial support allows *Discover the Word* and Our Daily Bread Ministries to make the life-changing wisdom of the Bible understandable and accessible to literally millions of people around the world. So if you'd like to make a one-time donation to support the ministry or give a monthly gift to *Discover the Word* as a partner, simply follow the easy steps online at



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discovertheword.org. Well, thanks for listening. I’m Brian Hettinga. *Discover the Word* is

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