



Vending Machine God

God's deliverance of His people was astonishing. Supernatural plagues. Miraculous rescue through the Red Sea. A cloud by day. A pillar of fire by night. Water from the rock. Bread from heaven. Freedom.

God's people had known about God, but now they know Him, and they weren't sure they liked what they saw. They wanted their situation to change, but God had turned His attention toward changing them.

And isn't that the way it always is? We shop for the kind of God we prefer ... the vending machine or divine ATM that gives us just what we ask for, the thing we want most. But God requires us to come to Him on His terms, to give us not what we want but precisely what we need. It's always an uneasy relationship between a God whose terms are non-negotiable and a people who stubbornly try to dictate those terms.

God's plan was clear: deliver His people through a series of miracles, defeat their enemies, give them a covenant and set of laws making them a chosen nation and provide a land of promise. Simple, right? God speaks, the people listen. God delivers, the people believe. God provides, the people trust. Well, maybe not so much.

God always held up His end of the bargain: He always provided, always delivered, always kept His promises. It turns out the people were equally consistent: They always forgot, always questioned, always rebelled. Their lack-of-faith list was long.

Then they reached Kadesh and Moses sent twelve leaders to spy out the Promised Land of Canaan. Ten of the twelve said the cities were too strong, the people too big and God too small. Only two, Caleb and Joshua, trusted God. The people complained and failed to believe.

This short term memory loss was not a senior moment.

The journey that could have taken 11 days from deliverance to the Promised Land instead took 40 years. They spent that time wandering aimlessly in the wilderness, reminding us that faith leads to life, and unbelief leads to death.

The tug-of-war between God and His people is relentless; and we see the true nature of Israel, as well as ourselves. It turns out their struggle mirrors ours to a "T". And we learn something very interesting about human nature.

Reflection:

1. In what ways has God been always reliable in your life?
2. Do you see any patterns in your life when you seem to forget God's faithfulness? Name them.
3. What do you learn about "human nature" in the actions of the Hebrews?