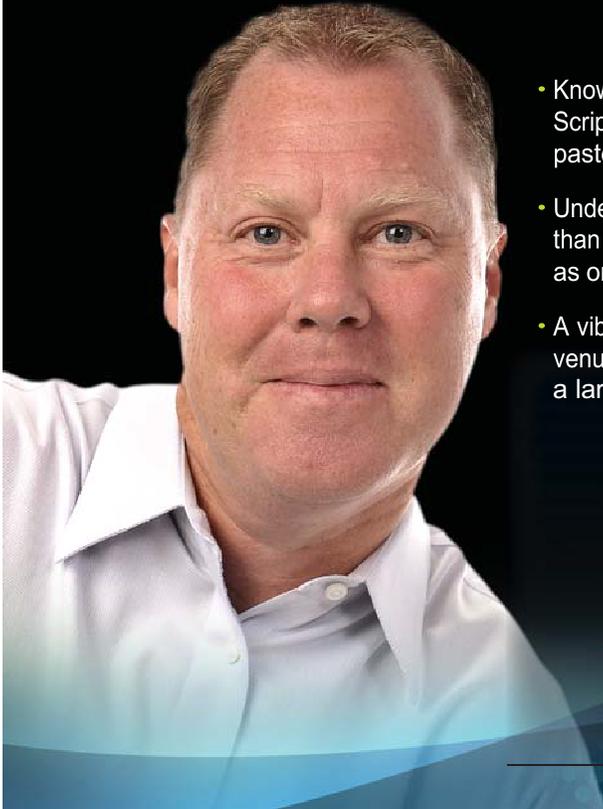


JEFF MANION

Senior Pastor,
Ada Bible Church, Ada, Michigan



- Known for his dynamic teaching skills and passion for communicating Scripture in a clear and relevant way, Jeff Manion has served as teaching pastor of Ada Bible Church for more than twenty-five years.
- Under Jeff's leadership, the church has grown from fifty people to more than 6,000 attenders. In 2009, Ada Bible was listed by *Outreach Magazine* as one of America's largest and fastest growing churches.
- A vibrant and growing ministry in West Michigan, Ada Bible uses video venues and two offsite campuses to create a small church feeling within a large church setting.

I. THE LAND BETWEEN

- A. For four years, a college student has the comfort, when asked, "What do you do?", of being able to say, "I'm an education major," or, "I'm an engineering major."
 1. Then, all of a sudden there's this horrible day that comes called graduation, and there isn't a job available that has anything to do with the four years of study they've just gone through.
 2. This is not only a challenge in the United States but also internationally. Jeff's youngest son moved to Ukraine after graduating from high school to spend two years serving a small congregation there. Many of his friends in Ukraine invested four years in college—time, money, energy, years of their life—and then ended up working a job very similar to the job they left before they went into college.
 3. Welcome to the land between.

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4. In the land between, we use language like “for now,” as in, “For now I’m living with my parents.” “For now I’m working at the same clothing store I worked at when I was a senior in high school, for about the same wage.”
- B. But the land between isn’t just for college graduates.
- C. There’s a real estate agent up late at night. The kids have gone to bed and he’s repeating a number—five—“I’ve sold five houses this year.” He looks back at 2007. In 2007 he sold twenty-seven homes, more than one every two weeks. Now in 2010, it’s five. “How much longer can I do this?” he thinks, “How much longer can we bleed financially before I find a different job?” Welcome to the land between.
- D. It’s a mom walking through her home, and she picks up a ten-year-old family picture. She looks into the eyes of her daughter, who was seven at the time. Now the daughter is seventeen, distant, defiant, angry, but she looks at that family picture, and the kid looks free and innocent and happy. Where did that kid go? And they’re trying to do ministry at the church, but she’s just trying to figure out how to heal her own family. This is the land between.
- E. This is where many of us find ourselves today. You pass into a discouragement, a depression. You don’t know how you got into it, and you don’t know how you’re going to get out of it. You just know that right now prayer doesn’t seem to be working, and you hope it ends soon. Welcome to the land between.

II. THE ISRAELITES IN THE LAND BETWEEN

- A. The land between is the Sinai Desert.
 1. On the left is the green of Egypt.
 2. On the right is the green of Canaan.
- B. In this story, the Israelites have left Egypt. They were in slavery there for generations, and God called Moses, who didn’t want this job to begin with, to go to Egypt and say to Pharaoh, “Let my people go.”
- C. When Moses is commissioned, God says to him, “I have heard the groaning of my people. I’ve seen their misery. I am concerned, and I’ve come to rescue them. Now I will take them out of the land of slavery and I will take them into the land of promise.”
- D. He doesn’t mention any space in between; it’s just: “I’ll take them out of the land of Egypt, into the land of promise.”
- E. In Egypt, though it was the land of slavery, it flourished. Things just grew there.
- F. The Israelites were a slave people, but they were a slave people in a fertile land, and they’re on their way to the land of promise, Canaan, which also flourished agriculturally.

- G. But right now, they're not in Egypt, the land of slavery; they are not in Canaan, the land of milk and honey. They are in the land between.

III. FERTILE GROUND FOR COMPLAINT

- A. God provided a food substance called manna, which meant, "What is it?" because that's what they asked when it fell to the ground.
 - 1. They went out in the morning, and there with the dew were these flakes, and they would gather these flakes and grind it up to make mush or bake it into cakes.
 - 2. This was the substance that God provided for them from His gracious heart for them to eat for breakfast, lunch and dinner, day after day.
 - 3. In Numbers 11, there was about to be a riot over this issue of manna: "The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, 'If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!'" (Numbers 11:4-6).
- B. You might think not much would grow in the desert, but the land between is fertile ground for complaint.
- C. We might judge them for complaining after seeing so many miracles, but have you ever eaten the same meal over and over?
 - 1. Jeff's friend Kevin took a two-week skiing trip. They would ski all day, get to the base of a mountain, summit the mountain, come back down, and camp out.
 - 2. Every single day, for breakfast, lunch and dinner, for two weeks, they had macaroni and cheese, and Kevin didn't want to eat it again for the next five years.
- D. It's possible to look at a story like this and place ourselves above the characters and think we'd never do anything like that, but it may be healthier to place ourselves among the characters and think, "Given the right set of circumstances, I would be right there with them."
- E. This is serious, because they were not simply complaining about their condition; they're complaining against God, and there's a difference.
 - 1. In longing for the days of Egypt, it's as if they were saying, "We were better off without you, God."
 - 2. There's something about this that is bordering on cosmic treason.
- F. Guard your heart in the land between, because there is something about the spirit of complaint, which could whisper, "God, I was better off without you in my life."

IV. FERTILE GROUND FOR EMOTIONAL MELTDOWN

- A. Now the question is how God is going to meet his servant Moses.
 - 1. Remember, Moses didn't want this job to begin with.

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2. In Numbers 11:11-14 it says, "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? 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 forefathers? Where can 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.'"
- B. The land between is not only fertile ground for complaint; it is fertile ground for emotional meltdown.
1. If you think that term is too strong, look at Numbers 11:15: "If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now—if I have found favor in your eyes—and do not let me face my own ruin."
 2. Moses has had enough.
- C. Whose voice do you hear in there other than the voice of Moses?
1. There's the voice of a couple who has gone in for medical test after medical test, and yet there is no solid diagnosis yet. Finally the wife just goes, "This is too heavy. I can't carry this anymore."
 2. There's the voice of parents who are trying to serve the church, and they have a child who has run far from them and far from God, whose heart is inaccessible, and they don't know if this kid is ever going to come back. There's a breaking point where they say, "This is too heavy. I can't carry this anymore."
 3. There's the voice of a pastor trying to navigate ministry in the middle of a divisive split. "God, I can't carry this anymore."
 4. There's the voice of a camp director staring at a list of fourteen telephone numbers, representing fourteen phone calls that he has to make. It has come to light that that summer a twenty-three-year-old counselor was involved with a sixteen-year-old camper and there's a pregnancy. The director has to call the board members and a few donors. He starts to work his way through the list, conversation after conversation, and he feels like someone has hooked up a hose to him and is draining him dry. That night he is absolutely drained, but he cannot sleep. He just goes, "This is too heavy. I cannot carry this anymore."
- D. Everybody who serves in a leadership capacity for any length of time understands this emotion.
1. It doesn't matter the country or the position.
 2. Throw yourself into spiritual leadership, and you will have moments when you come to the end of yourself.
- E. Jeff hears his own voice in there.
1. Ada Bible Church, which Jeff has pastored for twenty-seven years, is a sizable church, but it took forever to get off the ground.
 2. He and his wife were married at twenty-one years old, and he started preaching at the church a couple months later.

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3. It was a failed church plant of twenty or twenty-five people, and they asked him to preach there until they found another pastor.
4. He ended up staying and they started to grow, over one hundred in three years, as young couples and college students made this church their home.
5. It was euphoric seeing the church grow, and as he charted out the growth, he projected where they would be in two years.
6. They announced they were going to move out of the house they were meeting in and start building the following April.
7. Then in April, Jeff had the leadership challenge of standing in front of the congregation and saying that their plan and funding weren't together like they thought it would be, and rather than rushing into a building program they weren't ready for, they'd hold off until the next April.
8. People thanked him for not leading them into a program they weren't ready for.
9. During that year, a manufacturing company offered to buy their property, which would generate cash to build the building, but they would have to relocate, and during all this deliberation the clock was ticking.
10. The next April, Jeff had to announce they were delaying again to the next April, and nobody thanked him that Sunday.
11. Again the following April, they weren't ready.
12. During that time, their church "grew" from one hundred down to fifty as couple after couple, family after family said, "We just need to find something else."
 - a. These were people they had served with, given with, prayed with and, in some cases, cried with.
 - b. The financial weight grew on a diminishing number of shoulders.
 - c. Jeff always felt like he was being broken up with.
13. The next year, they did build, and on opening Sunday they were at about one hundred people, and they were overjoyed just to be back where they had been three years before.
14. Jeff's father was a pastor, and he believed he was prepared for days of disappointment. He wasn't prepared for years of disappointment—or being a disappointment.

V. FERTILE GROUND FOR GOD'S PROVISION

- A. You wonder how God is going to meet Moses and you hope he moves toward him gently and graciously, and not just for Moses' sake, because maybe that's how God might move toward us when we're worn out and say, "I can't do this anymore."
- B. In Numbers 11:16-17, it says, "The LORD said to Moses: 'Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the Tent of Meeting, that they may stand there with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them. They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone.'"
 1. When the Israelites were in the desert, they built the tent of meeting, also called the tabernacle, as a portable worship center. It's where they would go to meet with God.

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2. Apparently when Moses was appointed as the leader of the people, he received a very unique God endowment, a very special filling of God's Spirit for this leadership task, and God said he would take that Spirit and multiply it.
 3. God uses the same language that Moses used. Moses said, "I can't carry this anymore," and the Lord responds, "I will take the Spirit, put it on them and they will help you carry the burden so that you will not have to carry it alone."
- C. The land between is not simply fertile ground for complaint and for meltdown but for God's provision.
- D. Here He provides leaders to team up with Moses.
- E. What if he still does that? What if he provides not just for Moses, but what if he desires to provide for us?
- F. What if when we're worn out and beat up and we open our hands and say, "I can't carry this anymore," what if our gracious God says, "Keep your hands open; let me provide"?
- G. As you open your hands to release the crushing anxiety that you've been carrying, leave your hands open to receive whatever God will provide into your life.
1. Sometimes God provides employment or better employment, and sometimes he provides a capacity for contentment, to do without luxuries that used to be normal.
 2. Sometimes God provides a job and sometimes he provides the patience to send out one more resume or the strength to make five more phone calls.
 3. God loves to provide; it's what he does.
 4. He may provide for you by pulling you out of a depression, or he may provide by giving you daily strength to endure it.
 5. You may walk into church and sit down and the Scriptures are open and there is a spookily well-timed sermon for your situation that God provides.
- H. There's a story about another famous meltdown in Scripture.
1. Hundreds of years after the time of Moses, Elijah poured his life into rescuing the spiritual heart of his people, only to find that Queen Jezebel was going to kill him, so he ran for his life.
 2. He sat down under a tree and prayed that he might die, feeling his life's work had amounted to nothing.
 3. He lay down and fell asleep, and then an angel touched his arm; he awoke and near him was a jar of water and bread cooking over hot coals.
 4. You're expecting him to get a lecture, and God makes him lunch.

VI. FERTILE GROUND FOR GOD'S DISCIPLINE

- A. Now Moses' leadership issue is solved, but there is still the issue of the manna riots.

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- B. It says in Numbers 11:18-20: “Tell the people: ‘Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow, when you will eat meat. The LORD heard you when you wailed, “If only we had meat to eat! We were better off in Egypt!” Now the LORD will give you meat, and you will eat it. You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, or five, ten or twenty days, but for a whole month—until it comes out of your nostrils and you loathe it—because you have rejected the LORD, who is among you, and have wailed before him, saying, “Why did we ever leave Egypt?”””
- C. It’s because they have rejected God, not simply complained about the cafeteria food. They had turned a corner where they were saying, “God, we were better off without you.”
- D. Moses wanted to know where all the meat was going to come from, and God answered Moses, “Is the LORD’s arm too short?” (Numbers 11:23a). In other words, “Are you questioning my goodness or my competence?”
- E. The land between is not only fertile ground for God’s provision, but also for God’s discipline.
- F. There’s a part of the story here that is just ugly. God sends the quail migration of all quail migrations. They gathered them and laid them out to dry, and then the text says, “But while the meat was still between their teeth . . . the anger of the LORD burned against the people, and he struck them with a severe plague” (Numbers 11:33).
 - 1. We respect loving parents who bring timely and appropriate discipline to their children, and we know that doesn’t contradict their love; that’s part of their love.
 - 2. Discipline is inflicting pain for redemptive purposes, not causing pain for pain.
 - 3. It’s pain to rescue something, and God’s trying to rescue something here.
 - 4. If an employer has a promising employee who’s perpetually tardy and some days just skips out for no apparent reason, we would respect that employer for bringing appropriate discipline into the life of a promising employee.
 - 5. If we would respect a parent or an employer, why would we not see God as an authority figure who is fully capable and right and just in bringing correction where it is needed?
- G. We are naive to think we are immune from his corrective hand when we embrace a spirit of complaint that begins with, “I was better off without you.”

VII. FERTILE GROUND FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL GROWTH

- A. The land between is fertile ground for transformational growth.
- B. It’s one of the best soils we will ever be in to learn to trust our heavenly Father.
- C. God is whispering throughout this story and throughout our story, “I need you to trust me.”
- D. When the Israelites left Egypt, they were not an orderly, well-formed group of God followers. They have just been exposed to generations of idol worship in Egypt. They are an unruly mob of ex-slaves, indoctrinated in generations of idolatry.
 - 1. They are going to the land of promise, and they’re not ready. They are not the people of God yet.

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2. The land between, the desert, was intended to transform them from the people of slavery to the people of God.
 3. They needed this time, and throughout the time God is saying, "I need you to trust me. When you run out of water, I need you to trust me. When you run out of food, I need you to trust me. When Pharaoh's army is attacking you, I need you to trust me. Because you're going to get into the land of promise, and you're supposed to be my people there. And if you start to run out of food, and you run off to the shrine of the god Baal, this whole thing that I have planned for you is going to implode. I need you to learn to trust me here."
- E. It is in that space in the wilderness that we learn to really pray.
- F. It is in that space that we learn to depend.
- G. The land between is fertile soil for transformational growth, but this will not happen automatically.
- H. A popular expression is that "time heals all wounds," but this is not true. There are some people whom time does not heal; they get bitter, angry, caustic, acidic and poisonous over time.
- I. What this means is that when you travel through the land between, your heart is in danger.
- J. There are choices of the heart that have to be made in this land that are going to determine who you are out there in the future.
- K. The wilderness is the best greenhouse for transformational growth, but it is also the place where faith goes to die, and we choose.
- L. Moses opens up and pours his heart out to God. The Israelites just complain against God, and there's a difference.
- M. You don't have to extend an invitation for complaint to show up; complaint arrives as an uninvited guest.
1. You experience yet another disappointing day, and you walk into your house, and you discover that complaint has moved into your guest room, taken all the drawers, is doing a load of laundry and is rooting through your fridge for something to eat.
 2. Even as you seek to dislodge it, as you change the locks and move its luggage to the curb, it sneaks back in the guest room window.
 3. Complaint resists eviction.
 4. Good movement pushes out bad movement, and bad movement pushes out good movement.
 5. You deter complaint's return by inviting another guest into the house, and that guest is trust.
 6. It's saying, "God, I don't understand this, and I don't like this, but help me to trust you in this. I open my hands to release. I open my hands to receive. Please provide because we're dying here."

- 7. You invite in trust, and then when complaint tries to move back in, it discovers that trust has already taken the guest room and is utilizing all the drawers, and is already occupying the empty seat at your table.
 - 8. Trust evicts complaint; they are simply incompatible roommates.
- N. That space in your life that you most resent is the very soil where God wants to produce the crop we so desperately desire.
- O. The land between, the space that we hate, is the very soil where God does some of his richest and deepest work.
1. Are you experiencing the land between right now, or have you in the past? Take time to individually reflect on your current or past experiences in the land between. Feel free to journal some thoughts if you'd like.

My Land Between . . .

When everyone on the team is ready, if you feel comfortable, share your experiences of the land between.

The land between is fertile ground for complaint, but Jeff reminded us that trust evicts complaint. How would you assess the spirit of complaint on your team right now?

COMPLAINT HAS
MOVED IN.

COMPLAINT IS A
FREQUENT VISITOR.

THERE'S NO ROOM
FOR COMPLAINT HERE.



If there's no room for complaint on your team, talk about how trust has helped you deter complaint. Or, if there's more complaint among your team than you'd like, discuss how you might focus on trusting more.

2. In addition to complaint, the land between is also fertile ground for emotional meltdown, when we just can't carry the burden anymore, but God has a way of showing up with provision during those times. If you have experienced God's provision in that way, share your story with the team. Or, if you're currently in the land between and haven't seen God's provision yet, think about what provision you are hoping for, and take time right now to jot a prayer, or pray together as a team, about what you would like to ask of God.
3. Finally, Jeff reminded us the land between is the very soil in which God does some of his richest and deepest work in us. If you are experiencing a land between, God can use this difficult time to foster transformational growth, but you have a choice. Right now, if you feel ready, commit that you will choose growth, no matter what. You may decide to share your commitment verbally with your team, or write your thoughts below.