

**Pastor Jeff Williams**  
**April 8, 2001**  
**Dealing with Difficulties-Part VI**  
**Gardens in the Desert**

By the way, as we know, next week is Easter Sunday, and what a great opportunity to invite friends, family, co-workers, and neighbors to church. We've made plenty of room with three services, so you fill it up. Do your best to invite people to join you, and we're going to be talking about "Got Truth." I think that's where Pastor Scott came up with "Got Faith" from. "Got Truth" is next Sunday as we talk about the Resurrection. This Sunday we're talking about when God can turn our deserts into gardens.

Let's read together from the book of Exodus, Chapter 13, Verse 17 (pg 67): "When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, 'If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.' So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for battle.

Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear an oath. He had said, 'God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place.'"

After leaving Succoth they camped at Etham on the edge of the desert. By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people." Let's talk about it.

The vending machine is usually one of our best friends. For the most part, nine out of ten transactions in a vending machine are going to go pretty smooth. The vending machine is our friend because when I am thirsty, he is there. He provides a drink for me. When I am hungry, the vending machine is there and gives me that nutritious snack or that gum or chips, whatever it is. If I'm on the road, the vending machine gives me the comb or the Kleenex. Usually the vending machine is a very good thing to have around. It's an ingenious little invention where I drop in a few coins or a dollar, and the vending machine gives me the product or the resource I need for that particular situation.

Sometimes, you and I know that vending machines can take on, almost, a mind of their own, almost their own personality. I took some time to write down some of the psycho, demonic vending machines I've encountered in my life. Maybe you have too.

There's the Fussy vending machine. It only takes "certain" dollar bills and "certain" quarters. Sometimes it will say, "That's too many wrinkles. Go get another dollar."

Sometimes it won't take the dollar, and then it'll decide on the second or third insertion, "Okay, now I'll take it." Or at times, you'll drop the quarter through, and it drops all the way though, and you'll put it through again, and maybe the fourth or fifth time, it says, "Okay...I'll take it now" or "Get another dollar," and then it will take it. I've encountered the fussy machine; I've encountered the selective machine.

This machine judges people, I guess. It doesn't particularly like you. There not necessarily anything wrong with your dollar, but it doesn't like *you*. You'll try to get the dollar in there, and it doesn't work; finally, someone behind you says, "Let me try." They

have the same dollar you just tried, and they will insert it and the machine takes it. You are thinking, "What's wrong with me?" The machine didn't like you.

I've encountered the Pushy machine. The pushy machine is the machine that gives you a product other than what you asked for. That's really an evil vender somewhere that caused that problem, some guy who said, "He thinks he's going to get a Mountain Dew, but I'm going to give him a Pepsi instead. Hahaha haaaaa!!" But, it's when you select one thing, and it gives you something entirely different.

I've encountered the Teasing vending machine. Usually that's dispensing candy bars or chips, and it starts to come out and then teeters on the edge and stops. It will be hanging there by a thread, but it won't drop down so you can get it. It teases you, "Here I am." So you have to push the machine a little bit-April Fool's machine. Have you met this one?

The April Fool's Machine is when you put in your money, and then it decides to tell you that it's out of pretty much everything you want. You put in the money, "No, out of that. Nope, not that either." You ask "How about that?" It responds, "Sorry don't have that." You say, "Okay, I'll have this." It says, "Sorry, we're out of that too." There's one thing you don't like, water or something, and you have to take that. April Fool's!

The Gotcha vending machine makes all the right sounds. You hear things dropping and moving inside, but nothing comes out. It says, "Gotcha!"

None of you have encountered these machines? You always get what you want?

Then there's the Human Error machine. Human error is just where you press the wrong buttons. You read the machine wrong. You thought you were getting a Butterfinger, but the Kit Kat bar starts to come out. You are thinking, "E-3. NO! NO! NO! NO! E-6, E6, E6, E6!!" Down it comes. That best friend, that vending machine that we love so much because it was going to meet my thirst needs and my hunger needs, that goes from being my best friend to being my enemy.

I started by thinking, "Ohhh! A nice cold soda." Now all the sudden I'm saying, "You jerk!" I'm hitting it, and I'm shaking it, pushing it, kicking it, using all the French I know, until the manager asks you to leave the premises and you humbly go. But...that's another story.

Some of us treat God that way. We treat God as though God were some sort of a vending machine in which we get our needs met. We put in a little prayer, and out comes what we need. It's so nice to worship and serve a God when I put in a little prayer and out comes what I need. When that's going good, my faith is strong. I talk to my heavenly vending machine everyday. My heavenly vending machine vends out what I need. When I'm thirsty, He gives me drink; when I'm hungry, He gives me something to eat. He's there to meet my needs. The problem with that is God is not a vending machine. God is not here to cater to our needs. God is here to lead us on a spiritual walk in a spiritual journey. Many times, God will not give to us what we want or what we demand. How's our faith then? How's our faith then? When the vending machine, as we have treated Him, does not dispense the blessings that we desire, how's your walk at that moment in time?

We're going to refer to those periods of time in our life as the "desert" times. You say, "What do you mean by the desert times?" Number one, if you're in the desert time, you know it. It's a lonely place. The desert time can be described as a time when dreams turn into nightmares: when the marriage crumbles; when there's problems at home with children, prodigal children; when business dreams and ventures don't turn out; when

hopes become mirages; it's a lonely barren, dry place where the heavens seem brass. It doesn't seem like my prayers are getting through. It's a desert period. The bad news is we all go through those desert periods. The good news is God does his best work in the deserts of our lives. He really does-He does his best work.

We're going to look at the story here in the book of Exodus, Chapter 13. At this point in time, in the history of Israel, they are being led out from bondage and slavery of Egypt into the Promiseland. It sounds like it's going to be an out and in thing. It's going to be a slam dunk for God. God calls Moses in Exodus 3 and says, "I'm going to lead you out of Egypt and into the Promiseland."

Moses says to the people of Israel, "God's going to lead us out of Egypt and into the Promiseland. It's just going to be from here to there." Boom, like that. So God leads him out of Egypt. Now, they're leaving Egypt, and God is leading them in a physical way, sort of. It's kind of a manifestation of God that is sometimes called a theophany. That is when God appears in some sort of physical form, and in this case, it is as a cloud by day and a fire by night. I'm not saying God is a cloud or that the fire is God. It means that cloud and that fire are what presented the presence of God to the people of Israel. That cloud or that fire would go before them in the desert, and they would follow God's presence, and God would lead them.

So, here they are. They come out of Egypt, and they're all excited about getting into their own country-the Promiseland. But, little did they know that this journey that was supposed to take a few weeks, two or three weeks, was going to take 40 years. Some of you have started on spiritual journeys that you thought were going to be pretty quick, and it's been several years and you're still on the journey. Some of you have said, "Boy, if I'd have known it was going to take this long, I don't think I would have started it. So here they are, and they're waiting for God to lead them. They know that they're going to go east, and they're going to go north to the Promiseland. That's the straight shot. That's the quickest route. There is a way from Egypt to the Promiseland, and it's a pretty direct route across the peninsula, go east and head north, and there's the Promiseland. About two to three weeks' journey, and they would be there. But instead of doing that, something very strange happens. The cloud goes south. The presence of God goes in the opposite direction from where they should be going, and it begins to leave them to the desert. It's ironic, isn't it? We're supposed to be going east; we're supposed to be going north of the Promiseland, and God is taking us intentionally, deliberately into the desert. How many have been there? What's your response? It's frustrating. God, I'm supposed to be going north right now, and you're taking me south. What do we do in our spiritual walk when God begins to take us to the place we don't want to go? When God begins to take us south when we want to go north? We want to go to the Promiseland. We want to go to the land flowing with milk and honey. That's the incentive. That's the carrot. That's the hope, and God begins to take us instead to the desert. What do we do? Do we follow? Do we take a step of faith, and do we follow? Sometimes. Because we know how to get to the Promiseland, or at least we think we do. And we know the direct path or the shorter path is this way. Sometimes, we do get ahead of God. And other times, we obey and we follow God and we follow Him into that desert place. That's where God is. What we find is that in the midst of the desert, God is able to produce a garden. In the midst of our desert, God is able to produce some lifelong fruits that are there.

Now, I want us to look at Verse 17, and I want to share a point with you which is that **God is more interested in what you are becoming than where you want to go and how fast you want to get there.** They wanted to go to the Promiseland. They wanted to go there *now*. Get it done. But God was more interested in what they were becoming than where they wanted to go and when they wanted to get there. So, God led them in another way.

It says though God led them on the road through the Philistine country “though that was shorter. For God said, ‘If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.’”

This way is shorter, but God knew they weren’t ready for that way yet, because their mindset was that of a slave. For 400 years, they had lived as slaves. They were the great, great, great, great-grandchildren of slaves. They had a slave mentality, not a free mentality. They had a dependent mentality, not an independent mentality. God knew that if he’d led them on the shortest route, on the quickest path, as soon as those kingdoms that were independent and established began to wage war, they were going to take the easy way out and go back to Egypt. God knew that. So God led them toward the desert.

So there would come a day when they would be prepared. There would come a day when they would be ready, when they would no longer have a slave mentality, or where they would no longer function in that manner; but they would be ready to wage war, but this was not the day, and this was not the time. You see, many times when God leads us into the desert experiences of our lives, it’s because we’re not ready for what lies ahead. We may think we’re ready; we may think we know best, but we don’t know best. God’s way is not the easiest. It’s the hardest-but it’s always the best.

I remember hearing a story about a little butterfly. This little butterfly had come out of the cocoon. It was one of those rare moments where you really see the first signs of life as a butterfly emerges from that cocoon. This man happened to be on a hike through woods, and he saw it. He thought, “Man, look at! This is nature in operation here.” He just watched for a moment as that butterfly struggled to get free, struggled to get its wings apart. The wings were still wet, and they were caught. He said, “Something’s wrong. The butterfly’s wings seem to be stuck. It seems that it can’t spread its wings. If it could only spread its wings, it would fly, but because they’re stuck, it’s not able to do that.” So he decided he was going to help the poor struggling butterfly, and he decided to blow on the wings, gently blow on the wings, speed up the process. But what he did was he cemented the butterfly’s wings together. Drying too soon had sealed them together, so the butterfly could no longer fly and never would be able to fly. And after struggling for a period of time, it died. He thought he knew best; he thought he could speed up the process that God set in motion. You and I know that the times in our lives when we’ve gone ahead of God; when you’ve said, “I want to go to the Promiseland,” and God said, “You’re going to go to the desert.” And you say, “No, no, no, I’m ready to go. I’m ready to wage war.” And you go charging ahead. Those are the times when you fall flat on your face. Or maybe that’s not you guys, maybe I should be talking to the second service. We think we know best. We think we can usurp the process of God in our lives. God knew. God knew they were not ready for that season in their lives. There was a day coming when they would be, because desert experiences don’t last forever. They last for a season. I promise you that if you want to serve God, if you want to become strong in

God, you will log some time in desert. You will. Think about some of the great characters in the Bible. What did they do? They spent time in the desert, didn't they? They spent time in desert moments of their lives. Think of Moses, he's carrying Joseph's bones in the Promiseland. Joseph, this promising young leader, what did he do? He was sold into slavery by his own brothers, forced to live in slavery-imprisoned for a crime he didn't commit. And in that desert experiences which lasted for years, God was forging a character in Joseph that would lead the nation of Egypt. Remember when he encounters his brothers after being released from prison. He interprets the dream and he says, "When you get out of the prison, remember me to Pharaoh." Two years pass, and he doesn't do it. Finally Pharaoh has a dream, and Joseph is able to interpret it. He gets out of prison, and he becomes a prominent leader, second only to Pharaoh. His brothers, who had sold him into slavery, encounter Joseph. Joseph reveals his identity, and they're afraid for their lives. He says to them "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. God forged in me a patience that could lead a nation."

Patience is one of the fruits that we get in the desert. We want it now.

I read a true story this week about a criminal. He and another criminal escaped from prison. They dug underneath the security fence and escaped from prison. They were found and brought back, and years were added to their sentence. One of the prisoners, true story, he had 30 days to go before he was a free man. Thirty days to go and he would have been free. They told him, "You have years more to serve now because you escaped from prison. If you'd have only waited 30 days, you'd have been a free man." He says, "I know, but I couldn't wait."

See? That's our problem. Many times, we can't wait. We want what we want, and we want it now.

There were days when Israel was camped out in the wilderness when the pillar of cloud did not move. It just did not move. The fire did not move. What do you do? If you're the children of Israel, what do you do? You know where the Promiseland is. You know what mountains to cross. You know what water you have to cross. You know how to get there, and now the pillar is going the wrong way, and it's stopping. It's not moving. Do you trust God, or do you take off in another direction. Sometimes we're angry and upset with God because he doesn't go on our timetable. He's not in a hurry, and that bothers us. Sometimes he'll lead us to a point, and then it stops. His presence seems to be indicating to us, "Stay here and wait."

And we say, "Nooooo. I don't wanna. I wanna go. I don't wanna trust."

God gave the manna in the wilderness everyday to sustain them. Manna was what was left after the dew would leave the ground; it was this white substance that would linger on the ground. It was edible. It was the first time it ever appeared. After Israel was out of their wilderness wonderings, it never came back. God created this wilderness food for them called manna. In fact, the word "manna" means "what is it?" People would pick it up and say, "What is it?" "Manna?" So that became its name. The name of the food became "manna."

So everyday, they would eat "what is it." They had a tendency to want to store up the "what is it," because tomorrow there might not be more manna. What if God decided not to give us more manna tomorrow? So they'd store it up; it went foul. It became rotten and worm-infested overnight. God only gave them enough manna for today. That's

patience. Patience is when we wait on God for today, one day at a time, and we don't want to do that.

I'll take a year's worth of manna, thank you very much. Give me a year's worth of manna, so I have everything figured out. God doesn't do that. He gives manna one day at a time. The cloud leads, the presence leads, one day at a time. Some days it lingers; some days it goes in directions we don't want it to go, and we're frustrated. Sometimes it goes in the desert, and we're scared. It's a dark place; it's a lonely place, but God in the desert shows us that He's greater than darkness; He's greater than our pain.

As I think about that, I think of Daniel. Daniel, great man of God, how'd he become that way? He was led in exile. He was taken from his parents and from his homeland. He was castrated and forced to serve a Pagan dictator named Nebuchadnezzar. In those conditions, Daniel's faith flourished.

I think about David. He became a great king, but before he became a great king, he wandered as a fugitive in the wilderness.

King Saul had a death warrant out on him-take his life-though he'd done nothing wrong. He was in a desert period of his life. In that desert period of his life, David learned how to lead. He had a group of men, David's merry men, hundreds of men, rejects and cast-outs that formed around David, and he loved them. He learned about leadership in a wilderness/desert experience.

Our Lord Jesus, before he began his ministry, do you know what happened before Jesus began his ministry in the Gospel of Luke? After he was baptized, before his three years of public ministry was going to begin, God led Him where? To the temple? No. To the desert.

The Holy Spirit led Jesus to the desert for 40 days and 40 nights. He went without food, and he endured temptation at the hands of Satan.

You want to be great in God? You want to forge character? You want to forge patience? You want to forge obedience? You're going to have to log time in the desert.

I want us to turn, and I think it's fitting to do so, to the Book of Luke. I was going to turn to Matthew, but I decided we'll read the story in the Gospel of Luke. This is page 1044. Verse 39 (Chapter 22), let's read it together. Jesus knows that his time is short; He's about ready to go the cross. He's about ready to bear sin and give his life as a sacrifice. It says, "Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed Him. On reaching the place, He said to them, 'Pray that you will not fall into temptation.' He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, 'Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me, yet not my will, but yours be done.' An angel from heaven appeared to Him and strengthened Him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground."

This was not an easy period of time for Jesus. He was fully God, but He was also fully man. And the man part of Jesus was travailing. There was agony there. He knew the pain that awaited Him. He knew the suffering that awaited Him. This is Jesus' desert. He is there with his disciples, but He is alone. He called Peter, James, and John to come and pray with Him, but they were sleeping. This is a desert experience, and what does he pray? He says, "Father, if there's another way... If there's any other way that sin can be atoned for besides the cross, Lord, let that be done. But if in fact there is no other way, if in fact the cross is the only solution for the sin of people, Your will be done." This was not an easy time for Jesus. This is why he deserves our worship. This is why he deserves

our honor, because he suffered for us, not just physically, but he suffered spiritually, he suffered mentally. There was anguish in his soul.

You see, in the desert time, it is the time when we learn to say yes to God, when God asks us to do something we don't want to do or go somewhere we don't want to go. In the desert is where maturity kicks in. It's where we forge obedience. It's where God turns our dry places into gardens. He says, "God, if there's another way..."

See, it's easy to serve God when he's dispensing the blessings. I'm pressing the buttons, and he's giving them out. Though when he gives out something that I don't like; when he leads me in a direction I don't want to go; when he forces me to wait and linger, when I don't want to, what do I do? See, in the desert place, it's the prime opportunity which God will use to forge obedience in your life.

Where are you at right now with this? I bet you if I ask for a raise of hands, some of you are in a desert place right now, or you've come from a desert place, or you think you might be going to one. I bet you there'd be a lot of us who'd raise our hands to that.

You have some decisions to make. You have some decisions to make. You can decide if you're going to allow God to lead, if you're going to trust Him to lead, or if you're going to go on your own. It's your call; I can't make that for you. God will not make that decision for you. You have to make it for yourself. But I can promise you this, God will not abandon you in your desert. God is there.

It did not make sense to the children of Israel the way they were being led, but God was there. Many times, it does not make sense to you the way God is leading you, but God is there, and God sees the entire picture. You just see the immediate future, but God sees it all. That's when we have to learn to trust.

My pastor growing up, Pastor Lyon, used to tell the story many, many times about his son Curtis who at age four developed an inoperable brain tumor. Surgeon Dr. Mano said there's no way he can live. They opened him up and said, "We're going to sew him up and just believe that we were going to try to make him as comfortable as possible until the end. He basically lost the ability to breathe. There were periods of time in the night when it looked like he was going to die. He was struggling for breath. Pastor Lyon would get in there, and he'd say, "Curtis, say Jesus." With everything he had, Curtis would try to summon enough strength to go, "Jesus." And he would break, there'd be a break, and he'd be able to breathe again. Pastor Lyon said, "This is a spiritual battle, and I'm going to fight for my son." He and his wife, and the family, and the church began to fight and pray, and God performed a miracle. Curtis Lyon's brain tumor disappeared. All that was there was an empty cavity, full of fluid, but the tumor *miraculously* disappeared, and Curtis became a living testimony of the miraculous hand of God. He would sing in the church, "Expect a miracle everyday." That was his theme song when he was a little boy with the brain tumor.

As years went by, Curtis and I became friends from the age of ten all the way until adulthood and eventually became pastors together at the church in Rockford, so I came on staff in 1982, and he came on staff in 1983. From 1983-1989, we served together, and we became very close. One day we were playing football, and it was the staff and teachers against the high school team. He got hit and landed on his head. He couldn't get up. His feet were moving, but he couldn't get up. We helped him into the building. We took him home. We were in the kitchen of their house. I remember Pastor Lyon was standing there saying, "It's just nothing. He hit his head, that's all." As days went on, he

had problems grabbing glasses. He began to have problems walking. He would lose his balance and fall into walls. He was diagnosed with a tumor, a brain tumor. Again, too large to remove; again, inoperable. He struggled. Over a period of time, he was put into a wheelchair, and then he became pretty much dependent upon his mom and dad to do things for him. He was now probably in his early 30s. The condition deteriorated to the point where he was going to die, so they decided to operate. Dr. Mano, the same doctor that operated on him when he was four, operated on him now, 30 years later. It was a meticulous surgery that was performed under a microscope in a very sensitive part of the brain that takes care of the commanding control centers for the body. One wrong slip-up, and he would be a vegetable. After hours and hours of surgery, it was deemed a success. The brain tumor was removed. Curtis would live. In recovery, one of the therapists hooked up the breathing apparatus wrong to Curtis. It caused air to go where air shouldn't go. It put such a strain on his heart that he died. I remember being at the gravesite, just crying, seeing Pastor Lyon there by the gravesite, shaking his head, "It seems so unnecessary. So unnecessary." I remember him having to walk away and saying, "It's so hard to leave. It's so hard to walk away." One of the few times I'd ever seen him hurting or dependent, but I watched him. I watched his life. What would he do? This is a desert time for him. Would he fold? Would he abandon his faith? Would he abandon his faith in God and miracles? Would that be the end of his almost 40-year run in the city of Rockford? No.

During that desert time of his life, his faith intensified. His ministry intensified. The ministry that they have in Rockford has never been greater or stronger than it is right now. His faith has never been greater than it is right now. His character has never been greater than it is right now. It happened through a desert time.

What do we do? Many of us when we go through those desert times, we get so angry with God that like that vending machine, we want to shake Him, and kick Him and hit Him, and swear at Him. You want to say, "You give me what I want right now." God doesn't work that way. He is more interested in what we are becoming than what we want to do, and where we want to go, and how fast we want to get there. God is thinking with eternity in mind, and we are thinking with today in mind. Therein lays the difference.

I want us to close by reading a scripture in the book of Hebrews, Chapter 5, and in this chapter, the writer for the book of Hebrews, looks back on these times in the period of Jesus' life. Verse 7 (pg 1187), "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save Him from death..."

Does that sound like something you've done in your desert experience? You've made loud cries and tears? Felt like you were near death inside? Jesus was there. Jesus experienced exactly what you experienced. You cannot say to God, "You don't know how I feel.

"...and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him..."

You say, "Wasn't Jesus perfect?" He was God. The "Godman" in Him was perfect, but he was also a man. And where Adam struggled and failed, Jesus struggled and succeeded,

and in that, His flesh became perfect. In being made in the flesh, He became the source of atonement in salvation for you and me, through his obedience in the desert.

So, the question is, looking back on your life, if this little phase here was your life, during the days of (put your name in here)'s life on earth, he or she offered up prayers and petition with loud cries and tears to the One who could save him or her from death, and he or she was heard because of their submission. Would that be said of you, or will it be said of you that during that time, you chose to go another way? You chose disobedience. You chose the shortcut. You ran from the desert because you thought you knew best. You chose not to trust. You're writing this story right now. You say, "Well, I ran the other way. I went back to Egypt. I took the easy way out. I went back to Egypt, and I'm sorry about it."

The story's not finished yet. If you're here, and you're living and breathing and listening to this, God says, "This story is not finished yet with you." The last chapter has not been written. Saddle up with God and say, "God, from here on out, I want to wait on you. I don't want to forge ahead. I'm going to wait. When the pillar stops, I want to stop. If the pillar goes south when I think it should go north, I'm going south. If it leads me to the desert, I'll wait on you. I'm going to trust that you will build in me the obedience and the patience and the faith and the character that I need."

Let's pray together.

Father, all over this place this morning, there is such a diversity of desert experiences. Some of us are dealing with moral collapse. Some of us are dealing with physical infirmities and illnesses. Some of us are dealing with financial ruin. Some of us are dealing with a death of vision or a dream for a business or for a family or a friendship. Some of us, Lord, are struggling for what we can't even put a finger on as to why we are in this desert. We can't point to anything and say, "That's why I'm here." We just know we're here. We know there's pain, and we know it is dark. But we know you are greater than our pain. You are greater than our darkness. You will give a fire by night and a cloud by day, and you have promised to lead us. We don't always understand where you're leading, but we want to follow. We want to obey. We recognize and ask for your forgiveness for the times in our lives when we have treated you like a vending machine. When we have said, if we just say the right words, press the right buttons, if we put in what we think you want, you will give us what you need and we've blessed you; and then when you've dispensed something we did not want, we have cursed you. We've become angry. We've desired to leave you and go back to Egypt. We ask for your forgiveness. Lord as we partake of this communion supper this morning, in our minds as the time in Gethsemane, when all our souls lay in the balance, you said yes Lord to the Father. You said if there's another way, let this cup pass from me, but nevertheless, your will be done. You said yes to the cross. You said yes to suffering, and because of that, your flesh was made perfect, and you became the source of our salvation. God we give you thanks. God we cannot thank you enough for what you've done for us in Christ. As we receive of this communion, we affirm that faith. We affirm that decision, and we affirm our dependency upon you to lead us and guide us through the desert places, and we know that they're only for a season because eventually we get to the Promiseland. We give you thanks and praise for it. In Jesus' name, Amen.