

# On the move with God

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[ 0 : 00 ] Moving can be very difficult. For the first 17 years of my life, I was happily settled here in Kuching, the only place I've ever known.

And for 14 of those 17 years, I didn't even move school, never mind cities. But little did I know then that the middle portion of my life would be very different.

At the age of 17, I nervously got on a plane for the UK with only my older brother for company. And for the next 14 years, I would move seven times to different cities and even different countries.

That's an average of once every two years. And moving can be difficult. You have to get used to a different environment, sometimes even a different culture. You have to try to make friends all over again.

You have to work out where to get things and what sort of things are needed and even how things get done in your new place. And those of you present today who have done quite a bit of moving before would know how taxing moving sometimes can be.

[ 1 : 05 ] You have to deal with the atmosphere of uncertainty, the pressure on your sense of identity, that feeling of underlying anxiety. Would I fit in?

Would I be accepted? Would I ever feel at home here? Now, the book of Numbers is about a whole nation that is moving.

We've said already over the first two weeks of this series that the whole book is about a journey.

Israel is moving to a new home. But that means they're leaving their old home.

Now, I suppose we don't normally think of it this way, but in a very real sense, Egypt was their home. Exodus 12, verse 40 tells us that Israel had been living in Egypt for 430 years.

Just imagine if your family has lived in Sarawak since 1589. Now, this would really feel like home, wouldn't it? And so, in a very real sense, Egypt was Israel's home.

[ 2 : 10 ] They were used to the weather. They were used to the food. They were used to the roads, the landmarks, the familiar Egyptian uncle who delivered their posts every day.

Yes, they were captives in Egypt. But they probably got used to that too. Like prisoners who've been jailed for a long time, they got used to their routine.

Wake up by sunrise, get in the queue by 7am to get your breakfast, report to your Egyptian supervisor by 7.30am. Well, at least they knew what to expect day after day.

But now, their lives have been turned upside down. Everything has changed. One night, after 430 years, God told them it's time to pack up.

It's time to move out. It's time to leave Egypt. And so they go, ending up at Mount Sinai where they set up camp and where we find ourselves in our book of Numbers this morning.

[ 3 : 14 ] For the past 12 months, that's where they've been, awaiting the next move. And now, in these chapters, it's finally time to be on the move again.

Just look at Numbers 10, verse 11. On the 20th day of the second month of the second year, the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle of the covenant law.

Then the Israelites set out from the desert of Sinai and traveled from place to place. So it's time to begin their new journey to their new home.

But as with any move, they must have felt some apprehension. There must have been some underlying anxiety. A question mark about whether they were truly ready to make their move.

And that's the same, isn't it, when we believe in Jesus. We thought we were settled in our lives. We weren't looking to move. And then Jesus entered the picture and turned it upside down.

[ 4 : 23 ] He said to us, it's time to turn from going this way and follow me. And so no wonder the first disciples often thought of the Christian life as a journey.

The Apostle Peter says that we are sojourners on this earth. We are travelers. The Apostle Paul talks about living for Christ as walking with Christ somewhere.

When we become Christians, we become a people on the move. But we're not yet at our destination. And that's where Israel currently was as they moved from Egypt to the Promised Land. They're in the wilderness. And that's where we are currently, both individually and as a church. We're in between. We're not yet in paradise where the world will all be made right.

And so naturally, that comes with some anxiety. How can we ensure that we don't get disorientated or even lost while journeying through the wilderness?

[ 5 : 30 ] Years ago, Chin Yin and I had to travel to a place at night just outside Seremban for a leadership retreat. And our GPS couldn't work out where this place was exactly. And so we ended up going in circles in the dark, hitting dead ends or nearly falling into drains.

It was definitely no fun and even a little bit scary. So how can we ensure that we don't get disorientated or lost? Well, that's where our passage today comes in.

God gets us moving. And as we go on the move with God through the wilderness, he's going to give us three guiding principles to keep us on track.

So do open your Bibles back to Numbers 9 if you've closed it. And here, here's the first guiding principle. Remember the grace we've been shown.

Remember the grace we've been shown. Open Numbers 9 and you will see that we begin with an instruction from God to Moses. Verse 2.

[ 6 : 39 ] He said, Make the Israelites celebrate the Passover at the appointed time. Celebrate it at the appointed time at twilight on the 14th day of this month.

In accordance with all its rules and regulations. And so we begin with this celebration called Passover. And look at when this conversation takes place.

Verse 1. It's in the first month of the second year after they came out of Egypt. Now if you were to flip back to chapter 1 verse 1 for a moment, you'll soon see that actually in chapter 1 verse 1, the book begins on the second month.

In other words, chapter 9 verse 1 to 14 is taking place in the month before the beginning of this book.

So this is a flashback of sorts. This is truly the beginning happening even before the people were counted in chapter 1 verse 1.

[ 7 : 48 ] It's as if the writer is saying, Okay, first things first. We need to get foundations in place. Before we talk about getting on a flight to New York, we have to sort out visa applications first.

And so before we talk about setting out for the promised land, we have to sort out Passover first. We need to get foundations in place. But why?

Why is the Passover so significant, so foundational? Well, it's because Passover is all about remembering. You see, if you're an Israelite, you need to remember why you're on this journey in the first place.

And Passover acts as a constant reminder. Every year, as the Israelites gathered together to celebrate the Passover, they remember their starting point.

They remember that they were forced to work the fields and gather straws and produce bricks without any pay. They remember the time when their sons were targeted for murder and thrown into the river.

[ 9 : 05 ] They remember the time when they seemed to have no future and no hope. But as they began to prepare the bread without yeast, they remember too the time they cried out to God and He graciously answered them as He sent plague after plague in judgment on Pharaoh.

As they began to gather their healthy lambs and slaughter them at twilight, they remember the time when the angel of death came to claim every firstborn son in Egypt.

They remember that they were spared because of the blood of the lamb painted on the door frames of their homes. And they remember that this is where they first gained their freedom.

As Pharaoh tells them, go away! And God leads them on the way out. They've been rescued.

They've been redeemed. And that's why they're on a journey in the first place.

No rescue. No journey. And every single person in this camp knows that. They know that each one of them owes their ticket out of Egypt and indeed their very lives to God Himself.

[ 10 : 27 ] Their visa application to the promised land was paid by the blood of the Passover lamb. And celebrating the Passover meant they never forgot it.

They remember where they come from and that it's by grace alone. And that's the Christian life too. To ensure that we don't get lost on our journey, we need to remember our starting point.

We were slaves. Not to Egyptians or Americans or any other human being. Rather, we were slaves to sin. That's what Jesus says.

That means we had no ability on our own to do what is good in God's sight. Now, sometimes we think that we are sinners because we did something bad.

And so the way to fix it is by choosing now to do something good. Okay, problem solved. But Jesus tells us our problem goes deeper.

[ 11 : 38 ] We are not sinners because we sin, but we sin because we are sinners. Our human hearts, Jesus says, is like a fountain pouring forth polluted water.

When we sin, we are simply pouring out the pollution that's already in our hearts. We are not sinners because we sin, but we sin because we are sinners.

We are sins-willing slaves. Of course, none of us initially thought that we were slaves. We thought we were free doing what we wanted.

And yet, ironically, when we express those desires in our hearts, we found ourselves deeply dissatisfied. Just take pornography as an example.

If we look at pornography, we were probably desiring pleasure. And we get it for about a minute. But we needed more. And porn said to us, keep looking.

[ 12 : 49 ] I promise you excitement and intimacy. But the porn doesn't deliver. Instead, it begins to poison our real-world relationships, causing us to withdraw emotionally from real people and isolates us.

So rather than leading us to satisfaction or joy, it enslaves us. We find ourselves addicted. And that's just one picture of how sin operates as a whole.

We were slaves. Perhaps not to porn, but to something else. An excessive desire to be liked. The need to be in control.

The demand to always put ourselves first. And we couldn't escape. Our hearts were in chains. And so we remember.

But we remember not to feel bad, but to know the gospel as good news all over again. Because just like with the Israelites, God intervenes.

[ 13 : 57 ] And unlike sin, God doesn't just promise. He delivers. Jesus came and won our freedom by becoming our Passover lamb, sparing us from the oppression of the slave master and the judgment of the agent of death.

He paid the ransom price to rescue us from slavery. This is the gospel, and this is the visa that allows us to begin our journey to our promised land.

It's by sheer grace alone. And the beginning of Numbers 9 tells us, don't forget it. Remember. Celebrate it. Remind each other of it. Don't let it go out of sight. Just like you carry your passport with you wherever you travel. So keep this gospel with you.

And that's why as a church, the gospel must be proclaimed and sung and prayed constantly to remember.

[ 15 : 10 ] But I want you to notice something else. This is their second time celebrating Passover. Passover. The first time they celebrated was on that very night they left Egypt.

But in between celebrating the first and the second Passover, the people had already failed. It wasn't that long ago that these Israelites, fed up with waiting around on Mount Sinai, decided to build a golden calf and to worship it.

That story is told near the end of the book of Exodus. They committed idolatry and God was well within his rights to say, okay then, you clearly don't want me.

Since you want to take your own path, let's go our separate ways. But instead, here in Numbers 9, God says, come, celebrate Passover.

Come, eat with me, your redeemer. Well, that's not just grace, but grace upon grace, isn't it? How many of us, after such a blatant act of rebellion, would give the Israelites a second chance?

[ 16 : 35 ] I gave them chance already, they blew it, go and die. Too bad for them. That would probably have been my response. But God remains gracious.

He showed them grace when they were first slaves in Egypt. And now he shows them grace as they begin their journey outside Egypt.

And that gives us hope, doesn't it? Perhaps today, some of us have already gone off track. We become Christians, but it didn't take long for us to wander away.

And we came this morning thinking, I've blown it. I knew Jesus, but I left him. And he probably doesn't want me anymore after I went to do my own thing.

I can't come back. But Numbers 9 tells us differently. It shows us a God who is grace upon grace.

[17:36] And when we experience grace, we get back on track. Look at how the Israelites responded this time in verses 4 to 5. So Moses told the Israelites to celebrate the Passover.

And they did so in the desert of Sinai at twilight on the 14th day of the first month. The Israelites did everything just as the Lord commanded Moses.

Their response to grace upon grace was obedience. But that's not the end to this picture of grace just yet.

In chapter 9 verses 6 to 12 an issue is brought up. What happens if someone becomes ceremonially unclean and can't celebrate the Passover because they have encountered a dead body?

Well, God says, no worries. If that's the case, they can still celebrate. They just have to do it one month later. There's provisions in place for that kind of situation.

[18:40] You see, God wants people to come into fellowship with Him and He's not going to let dead bodies stop Him. He provides every means possible for people to draw near to Him.

As we journey with God together in this life, sometimes we might wonder, is God really for me? Why does He sometimes make it so hard? What about all those situations that seem designed to keep me away from God?

Might it be that He isn't so keen after all to have me journey along with Him? And yet, Numbers 9 verses 1 to 12 tells us that God isn't trying to keep us at a distance the way we try to keep that chain-smoking, foul-smelling relative far, far away.

He wants us to come home with Him. And it's only those who clearly don't want God, who reject Him and His provisions, who won't make it.

Look at verse 13. But if anyone who is ceremonially clean and not on a journey fails to celebrate the Passover, they must be cut off from their people for not presenting the Lord's offering at the appointed time.

[20:01] they will bear the consequences of their sin. So how can we ensure that we stay on the move with God? How can we keep from being disorientated?

Remember the grace we've been shown. But it's not just about looking back. And so we come to our second principle.

Be confident God will take us home. Be confident God will take us home. Now suppose that you've booked to a place, you've booked to go to a place that you've always wanted to go later this year. Maybe Croatia. I think one of our church members is there right now. But you begin imagining that you're already there. Through the confusion of your family members, you begin learning and talking Croatian to them.

You give instructions to your grab driver to take roads found in Dubrovnik, not Kuching. You go down to Aeon Mall to get that rare ingredient to make your Croatian steal.

[21:10] Your best friend says to you, it's as if you're already living there even though you're here. Well, you get something like that happening sprinkled throughout numbers 9 to 10.

So just come back with me to Numbers chapter 9 verse 10 for a moment. Now remember the context, some people have just approached Moses asking him, how can they celebrate Passover if they've encountered a dead body?

And the Lord answers in verse 10, tell the Israelites when any of you or your descendants are unclean because of a dead body, okay, so far no problem.

God is just addressing the problem that the man brought up. But then he goes on to say, verse 10 again, all are away on a journey.

Eh? Who said anything about going away on a journey? What's that got to do with the original question anyhow? And think about it, the people are getting ready to move homes.

[22:17] So how can some of them go away on a journey when they're already on a journey? Well, this only makes sense if we realize that God is being forward-looking here.

He's thinking about the time when his people will already be in the land. He's providing guidelines for the time when they'll already be in their new home.

After all, they can only go outstation once they've actually settled in the promised land. But God is giving them instructions as if they are already living there in the promised land even though they're still here at Mount Sinai.

We find something similar going on in chapter 10 verse 8 to 9. Let me read it. 10 verse 8. We'll look at the trumpets again later on.

But notice that the instructions here assume that they're going to arrive. Do you see that in verse 9? When you go into battle in your own land.

[ 23 : 57 ] And so God is once again thinking of the time when they're already in their new home. If you were to read on in verse 10, you'll see that God expects victory since they'll be able to hold their festivals and to rejoice.

So although they're still here in the wilderness, God acts as if they will already be there in the promised land.

He's certain that his people will get home. So what we're getting here is a quiet understated assurance that God will do as he says.

He will see that we make it through the wilderness. And over and over again, the New Testament says the same thing. Just look at Philippians 1 verse 6.

Paul is confident that he who began a good work in you will carry it to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Or 1 Thessalonians chapter 5.

[ 25 : 05 ] May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

He will take us home. Every time an Israelite heard the trumpet, he will look forward with gladness. One day he will say, I will hear that trumpet in my new home.

And so perhaps at this moment you are facing a trial or a temptation. It's intense. Perhaps it's illness or conflict or pressure at work or just a particularly intense battle with sin.

And it's hard to keep running the race, to keep walking with Jesus. Every step of the journey feels laboured. you're weary.

You feel like giving up. You want to walk away and say, I want to stop being a Christian. Or perhaps you say, I want to stop living as a Christian.

[ 26 : 18 ] I'll keep the Christian label. I'll say that's my religion. I'll show up to church on a Sunday. But I'm not going to be too bothered otherwise. God says, now you can keep going.

You can keep going all out. Not because of your own strength, but because of the Lord's. He will take you home if you keep holding his hand.

And so don't get distracted or stray from the path. He will take you there. And the Lord will not only take us there, He will be with us every step of the way.

Look at Numbers 9 verse 15 to 16. On the day the tabernacle, the tent of the covenant law was set up, the cloud covered it.

From evening till morning, the cloud above the tabernacle looked like fire. That is how it continued to be. The cloud covered it and at night it looked like fire.

[ 27 : 29 ] And so we have this cloud which looked like fire at night coming to be with God's people and it's the visible sign of God's presence. It gave direction in the wilderness.

Verse 17 tells us that when the cloud lifts, it's a sign to move on. Whereas if the cloud settles, it's a sign to stop. And so God is there every step of the way.

And he's the one navigating his people as they make their way home. Well, that's another reason to be confident. We have the best GPS in the world.

Not like that GPS in Seremban that Chinyin and I had. We had God himself. God will take us home. But how exactly do we show our confidence?

How do we know if we are being confident that God will take us home? Well, look at Numbers 9 verse 18 to 23. Now, this section is almost poetic with a refrain that's repeated three times.

[ 28 : 40 ] Look at verse 18. At the Lord's command, the Israelites set out, and at his command, they set up camp.

As long as the clouds stayed over the tabernacle, they remain in camp. Well, that comes up again in verse 20. Sometimes the cloud was over the tabernacle for only a few days.

At the Lord's command, they would set up camp, and then at his command, they would set out, and then down in verse 23. At the Lord's command, they set up camp, and at the Lord's command, they

set out.

They obeyed the Lord's order in accordance with his command through Moses. So I think you're getting the idea. At the Lord's command, they encamp, and at the Lord's command, they set out. In case you didn't get it, well, this big idea comes true again when we get to the section on the silver trumpets in chapter 10 verse 1 to 10. You see, in that section, we get a list of what all those different trumpet blowings mean.

[ 29 : 50 ] So when the trumpet blows like this, okay, that means the whole community is together. When the trumpet blasts like that, okay, that means the people on the east are to set out.

And so we get a list of what the different trumpet blowing and blasts means. in other words, the trumpet blasts and the cloud like a fire put all these people under the command of God.

The trumpets are to be listened to. The cloud is to be followed. For all these, as verse 10 will point out, are to be reminders that the Lord is their God.

And so you live under God's rule. And so it is as you trust and obey, as you follow that cloud, as you listen to those trumpets, that you are showing your confidence that God will bring you home.

You are following his leading. So just imagine, imagine you're an Israelite in the camp. That's your life.

[ 31 : 03 ] You do everyday things, washing the clothes, arranging your belongings, etc. But as you're sitting down, getting ready for dinner, suddenly the trumpet sounds.

And so your plans change, especially as you see the clouds, the cloud rises up. You're on the move again. You see, your life is tied directly to what God is doing.

You can't say, let me just finish cooking my Meggie Mee first and then finish my YouTube browsing after that and then I go.

No, it's part of the greatest story of this journey to the promised land. And you can't always see or tell when God is going to head out or going to stay put.

but you know he's leading you. Every step forward is a step closer to home. And if you're one of his people, you go as he leads.

[ 32 : 08 ] That's how you show your confidence. The cloud rises, the trumpet blows, and so you move. And you see that in chapter 10 verse 11 to 36, as the people see the cloud rises for the first time, and they begin to follow the SOP already set out in previous chapters.

And your life is in his hands. You won't get lost when you trust his leading. I've seen that firsthand in my own life, as I unexpectedly found myself taking my first steps into ministry in the UK, and then abruptly moved to KL when the visa fell through, and then suddenly being given responsibility to lead a congregation when I was only 27 years old, and then being provided a way when there was no way for me to pursue theological studies in Sydney, and through all that, the Lord was seeking to grow me.

God knows what he's doing, so be confident God will take you home. Thirdly, and more briefly, invite invite others to come along.

Invite others to come along. In chapter 10, in the midst of all of Israel's preparation to set out, we get to overhear a little conversation between Moses and this guy called Hobab.

Just look at 10 verse 29. Now, Moses said to Hobab, son of Ruol, the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, we are setting out for the place about which the Lord said, I will give it to you.

[ 33 : 57 ] Come with us, and we will treat you well, for the Lord has promised good things to Israel. Now, who is Hobab? He's the son of Ruol, otherwise known as Jethro, Moses' father-in-law.

And so that makes him Moses' brother-in-law. And he's an outsider. He's not an Israelite. He's a Midianite.

But Moses invites him along on the journey. You see, what God is showing us here is that Israel isn't a close group. Right here, at the very beginning of their journey, people are being invited along.

And it's natural for Moses to invite him along. Because, if you look at verse 29 again, Moses is convinced that the Lord has promised good things to his people.

He's promised the best home beyond their imagination. And if Hobab joins in, well, he can enjoy those blessings too.

[ 35 : 04 ] After all, if you turn back one page with me to chapter 9, verse 14, this is what we read. a foreigner residing among you is also to celebrate the Lord's Passover in accordance with its rules and regulations.

You must have the same regulations for both the foreigner and the native-born. And notice, God assumes that there will be non-Israelites who would want to take the Passover.

Whenever somebody understands and accepts God's grace, whenever he or she hears the promises of God and is willing to entrust themselves to God on that basis, well, they become one of God's people.

And they will be fully included. Just look again at what Moses says in chapter 10, verse 32. 2. If you come with us, we will share with you whatever good things the Lord gives us, they get the same inheritance.

And so the point is clear. It doesn't matter what your background is. You are invited on the journey. If you're not someone who trusts in Jesus this morning, well, let me invite you to investigate Jesus further for yourself.

[ 36 : 27 ] And I can assure you that he'll be very different from Buddha or Muhammad or Karl Marx. And those of us on the journey should make every effort to invite others along.

You see, the danger for many churches is that they forget this. It's easy for a church, once they've become established, to settle into a comfortable routine. They become settled into familiar patterns and start to lose its focus.

And as the context around them changes, they fail to see where they might need to change so that the unchanging gospel can keep going out. They enjoy the close-knit fellowship among themselves, but without realizing it, they begin to drift into exclusiveness.

They become a close society only for the insiders. They forget to invite others along. If they do, it has to be done on their terms.

And that's the story, sadly, of many churches. And so we need to work hard to make sure that that's not our story. For our church, KEC, to stay on track, we need to keep thinking about who and how and where we can invite people on the journey.

[ 37 : 46 ] And that's why we have Christianity Explored, so people know our God of Grace. that's why we have our newcomers corner, to start putting in place systems and structures to make it easier for newcomers to connect and feel included.

But those are just structures. Ultimately, we need to pray and ask God to open our eyes to make the most of the opportunities we've been given to invite others to consider him.

we should rejoice when we meet people in our churches who have not been here for longer than a year, because that means people are being invited along.

We should be concerned if our church is exclusively made up of people who have been here ten years or longer. for the Lord has promised the good of our heavenly home to those who accept him as their redeemer and Lord.

And so we want to share that wonderful blessing with others. So moving is difficult. And being a people on the move is challenging.

[ 38 : 59 ] Moving forward rather than staying put can be scary for some of us. But there is nothing to fear. The Lord is with us.

And as we remember his grace shown to us, as we exercise confidence that he will bring us home, well that frees us to invite others along the way to come along.

And as we do all that, we won't get lost. We will stay on track. For we long for a better country, as Hebrews 11 verse 16 puts it, therefore, God is not ashamed to be called our God, for he has prepared a city for us.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we praise you again, that when we were still in chains, when we were still enslaved, you broke into our lives through Jesus and freed us from our slavery to sin so that we might serve you with all our lives.

And Father, as you call us to go on a journey, we look around and sometimes we see all these dangers, we see all the scary things around us, but help us instead to lift our eyes to you, knowing that you are a good and gracious God who is able to secure our pathway home.

[ 40 : 37 ] And may that lead us to put our full confidence in you, to trust and to obey. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.