Unit 5, Session 1

A Test in the Wilderness

Summary and Goal
God had delivered His people out of slavery in Egypt through His powerful works. But in this session, we will see that the people forgot what they had seen, they lost sight of God’s power, and they doubted and grumbled when they became hungry in the wilderness. We will see that we are not much different from the people of Israel: We too are prone to forget the promises of God; we are prone to wander from the Lord, even when He has proven Himself to be good and faithful. We will learn of God’s great faithfulness despite our faithlessness and why He allows His children to go through trials and tribulations.

Session Outline
1. God provides for His people in their time of need (Ex. 16:2-4).
2. God provides for His people despite their disobedience (Ex. 16:13-20).
3. God provides for His people in unexpected ways (Ex. 17:3-6; 1 Cor. 10:1-4).

Session in a Sentence
God is gracious to provide for His people, even when we fail to obey Him.

Christ Connection
Moses struck the rock instead of the people, and water flowed for the people’s salvation. Jesus is the Rock who was struck for our salvation, the Rock whose living water satisfies us forever.

Missional Application
Because we have experienced God’s grace through the striking of His Son, we receive God’s faithful provision for our daily needs with gratitude as we testify of His kindness to others so that they too may come to trust in Him.
EXPLAIN: Use the bullet points in the DDG (p. 75) to recap the exodus story thus far and set the context for this session.

The exodus story thus far:

- God showed His power in miracle after miracle in the plagues and delivered His people out of Egypt.
- God delivered His people through the Red Sea and caused Pharaoh’s army to be swallowed up by the same sea.
- Safe and secure in the presence of the Lord on the other side of the sea, the Israelites expressed their worship through singing.
- The Israelites followed God’s leadership through Moses for three days in the wilderness and could not find water, and they began grumbling. When their throats became dry, their memories became short.

SAY: It is easy to read the story of the exodus and be critical and frustrated with the behavior of the Israelites, but we need to realize how much we are like them. We have seen God work in our lives, and we have praised His name in response, but then something didn’t go as planned and our worship gave way to grumbling.

INTERACT: Ask groups of 3-4 to discuss the following question.

When have you forgotten, or almost forgotten, God's goodness because of a difficult situation in your life? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

SUMMARIZE: In this session, we will see that the people of Israel forgot what they had seen, they lost sight of God’s power, and they doubted and grumbled in the wilderness. We will also see that we are not much different from them. But we will learn that the Lord does not take His people into the wilderness because He is cruel or because He has forsaken us—He does so to sanctify us, to make us rely less on ourselves and more on Him. The wilderness, as we will see, is a blessing from God, not a curse.

For additional teaching options and other resources, please visit www.GospelProject.com/additional-resources.
Point 1: God provides for His people in their time of need (Ex. 16:2-4).

READ: Ask a volunteer to read Exodus 16:2-4 (DDG p. 76).

2 The entire Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. 3 The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by pots of meat and ate all the bread we wanted. Instead, you brought us into this wilderness to make this whole assembly die of hunger!”

4 Then the Lord said to Moses, “I am going to rain bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. This way I will test them to see whether or not they will follow my instructions.

INSTRUCT: Ask group members to plot their default reaction to the Israelites’ grumbling with the scale in the DDG (p. 76), and ask them to consider why they chose what they did. Allow any volunteers to share their responses, if they wish.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 76) to highlight that the Israelites grumbled out of fear.

After God had proven Himself many times over, even providing water for them in the wilderness (Ex. 15:22-27), the Israelites again grumbled in fear instead of resting in faith. Their fear caused them to complain and to distrust God. They started believing it would have been better to die in Egypt as slaves than to follow God in the wilderness.

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 76) to show how God responded to the Israelites in love. Then help group members understand how this same God continues today to show love and grace to His people.

Yet once more we see God’s faithfulness, love, and grace on display for His fearful and distrusting people. God’s patience truly runs deep. God responded to their grumbling not in wrath but in love, raining down bread from heaven to feed them. While the refrain of the Israelites was to doubt God, question Him, and walk in disobedience, God’s refrain is to extend His grace, mercy, and forgiveness again and again and again.
This is who God is, and He hasn’t changed. God is just as faithful, even when His people today are just as faithless (2 Tim. 2:13). We wander and run from God. We doubt Him. We complain and question His character. We put our hope in other things—even the absurd—instead of turning to God, trusting Him, worshiping Him, and hoping in Him. And yet, God continues to love us and extend liberal amounts of grace and mercy to us.

Commentary: Just because God loves us doesn’t mean He won’t put us through trials and tribulations. In fact, because God loves us, He allows us to be tested and even to suffer at times. The problem is that we don’t understand trials. We see trials as God’s way of figuring us out, of seeing what we can handle and how deep our spiritual maturity runs, as if He needed to collect information on us. That is why we balk at the pain we endure. But trials are not for God to know our faith; they are so we might come to know our faith. Through trials and suffering, God strengthens us. He deepens our roots so we might stand more boldly for Him despite the storms that howl around us. That’s why we consider it all joy when we face various trials, because we know that God is at work in and through them for our good (Jas. 1:2-4).

FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 76).

God Is Gracious: God’s nature is to delight in giving unmerited favor to those who are undeserving. His grace toward sinners is found most clearly in the salvation He has provided through Christ.

Essential Doctrine “God Is Gracious”: God’s nature is to delight in giving unmerited favor to those who are undeserving (Eph. 2:8-9). His grace toward sinners is found most clearly in the salvation He has provided through Christ. Because of sin, humanity is undeserving of salvation—all of us have turned our backs on God, and as a result, we deserve death (Rom. 6:23). However, instead of leaving people in their sins, God has demonstrated His graciousness by providing atonement and forgiveness for our sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus (2 Cor. 5:21).

INTERACT: Ask the group the following question.

What are some ways we can remind ourselves of God’s love for us in Christ when it feels as if God’s love has waned or ceased? (we can read Scripture to be reminded that God is always the same and His love never changes; we can look back at our own lives and see how God has loved us and provided for all of our needs; we can seek the counsel of brothers and sisters in Christ who will encourage with the truth of God’s Word that He is faithful, gracious, and unchanging)
Point 2: God provides for His people despite their disobedience (Ex. 16:13-20).

SAY: In their hunger and fear, the people doubted and grumbled, yet God was gracious and promised to provide bread from heaven for them. But God’s provision came with a caveat: The people were to gather only what they needed for each day. On the sixth day, they would find they had twice as much as the other days so they would not need to gather on the Sabbath. This would be God’s way of testing His people (Ex. 16:4-5).


13 So at evening quail came and covered the camp. In the morning there was a layer of dew all around the camp. 14 When the layer of dew evaporated, there were fine flakes on the desert surface, as fine as frost on the ground. 15 When the Israelites saw it, they asked one another, “What is it?” because they didn’t know what it was.

Moses told them, “It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat. 16 This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Gather as much of it as each person needs to eat. You may take two quarts per individual, according to the number of people each of you has in his tent.’”

17 So the Israelites did this. Some gathered a lot, some a little. 18 When they measured it by quarts, the person who gathered a lot had no surplus, and the person who gathered a little had no shortage. Each gathered as much as he needed to eat. 19 Moses said to them, “No one is to let any of it remain until morning.” 20 But they didn’t listen to Moses; some people left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and stank. Therefore Moses was angry with them.

EXPLAIN: Show how God provided bread from heaven for the Israelites and how His provision was satisfying. God’s heart was to provide for His people, but it was also to test them, to refine them, and to move them toward greater trust and obedience.

• At the heart of God’s instructions to the people regarding the bread He provided were these questions: Will you trust Me to provide for your needs? Will you follow Me when My way differs from yours?

• To understand the nature of God’s wilderness test, we need to understand that the bread He provided was satisfying. When God told the people to gather a portion each day, whatever they gathered was the exact amount they needed. Whatever was left over at the end of the day would rot before the next day. Why? Because God wanted them to go to sleep each night trusting not in the bread they had stockpiled by their effort but rather in the God who would faithfully provide bread for them each morning.

Commentary: When God rained bread from heaven, the Israelites named this bread “manna” because they didn’t know what to call it (Ex. 16:31). The word manna literally means “What is it?” (16:15).
READ the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 77).

In this test, God was teaching the Israelites not to rely on their own efforts but instead to rest in His perfect provision. Even in trials and tribulations, the Lord provides. He satisfies. God would provide manna every day for His people for forty years as they wandered in the wilderness. He gave them exactly what they needed to flourish, and He does the same for us.

INTERACT: Ask the group the following question.

In what ways has the Lord provided for you, even in difficult times? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 77) to highlight the sanctifying purpose of God’s method of providing bread for the Israelites.

The bread God provided, called “manna,” was not just satisfying but also sanctifying. It not only fed their appetites, it also fed their faith. God had told Moses as much: His provision of quail and manna would cause the Israelites to know He is the Lord (Ex. 16:12). Later, when Moses reflected on this time in the wilderness, he described it this way: “He humbled you by letting you go hungry; then he gave you manna to eat, which you and your fathers had not known, so that you might learn that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deut. 8:3).

• God wanted His people to see their desperate need of Him. His provision of manna was bigger than food—it was His way of showing them that they needed to trust Him alone for that which sustains their lives physically and, more importantly, spiritually.

• Moses was not the only one in Scripture to provide commentary on God’s provision of manna—Jesus did as well (see John 6:31-35). After His miracle of the loaves and fish, Jesus spoke of Himself as the true bread of life: “I am the bread of life … No one who comes to me will ever be hungry, and no one who believes in me will ever be thirsty again” (v. 35).

Voices from the Church

“Going through the wilderness was not necessary for Israel’s salvation, but it was necessary for their sanctification.”

—Philip Graham Ryken
**Point 3:** God provides for His people in unexpected ways (Ex. 17:3-6; 1 Cor. 10:1-4).

**SAY:** After all they had seen God do for them, the Israelites continued to struggle to trust Him. Soon, Israel faced a familiar situation: They had no water to drink (see Ex. 15:22-27). Previously, they grumbled to Moses and God made bitter water drinkable. But this time, they could not even find bitter water. What would they do? Had they seen God’s hand enough to respond in faith, or would they once more respond in fear?

**READ** Exodus 17:3-6 (DDG p. 78).

3 But the people thirsted there for water and grumbled against Moses. They said, “Why did you ever bring us up from Egypt to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”

4 Then Moses cried out to the LORD, “What should I do with these people? In a little while they will stone me!”

5 The LORD answered Moses, “Go on ahead of the people and take some of the elders of Israel with you. Take the staff you struck the Nile with in your hand and go. I am going to stand there in front of you on the rock at Horeb; when you hit the rock, water will come out of it and the people will drink.” Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 78) to connect this unusual miracle with our salvation.

God once again provided for His people in spite of their faithlessness, but He did so in an unusual way to reveal both His power and His presence with certainty (Ex. 17:7). And once again we see that God was providing more than just water to satisfy His people’s thirst. This miracle pointed to the greater provision of salvation in Jesus. God chose to strike the rock and not His children, foreshadowing the day when He would send the Son to be struck once and for all for our salvation.

**READ** 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 (DDG p. 78) to provide the New Testament commentary on the rock at Horeb.

1 Now I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ.

**SAY:** Just as the manna pointed to Jesus as the bread of life (John 6:35), both the rock and the water that flowed from it pointed to Jesus as well. God has given us Christ Jesus, the One who completely satisfies our greatest need—forgiveness of sin and eternal life. And yet, like the people of Israel in the wilderness, we too are called to trust God. We too must turn away from our fears and turn to Him in faith.
INTERACT: Ask the group the following question.

Why is it significant that God provided for the people of Israel in unexpected ways? (His ways revealed His power over His creation; His unexpected methods proved His presence with His people; His unique ways showed that He alone was the provider of all they needed)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 78) to point out that the wilderness tests were ultimately about Jesus as God was teaching His people to trust in Him for provision, even for their salvation, and showing them their need to yield control to Him.

Because of our sin, we faced an impossible, hopeless situation, much more dire than that of the hungry and thirsty Israelites. But God provided the answer no one could expect: Through Jesus Christ’s life of perfect obedience and laying down His life on our behalf, we are able to have life in Him. Like the Israelites, we did nothing—we could do nothing—to earn or deserve Christ. All we have been called to do is surrender our control and trust in Him, our spiritual Rock struck for our salvation.

Commentary: Like the Israelites, we are prone to grumble and try to wrestle control from Christ. When we are honest with ourselves, we recognize it is not because He has failed us in any way. It is not because He has called us to go where He has not gone before or to do what He has not done Himself. No, we grumble because we want Jesus to save us but we don’t want to follow Him according to His plan. We want to travel through the wilderness of this life with ample provisions and camp beside flowing streams of pure water. We don’t want to step out in faith and feel empty stomachs and swollen, parched tongues. But spending time in God’s Word shows us that following God—following Christ—is not easy. It was never intended to be, because following Christ is about surrendering our control and trusting in His provision. Yes, God’s provision is sanctifying, but it is ultimately satisfying.

INTERACT: Ask the group the following question.

Why do we find surrender to God in Christ so difficult? (our own pride; fear of what surrender might mean because we don’t trust God; we are content with some things as they are and don’t see the need to give God control over them; we think we can keep some things secret from God and hold onto them for ourselves)
EXPLAIN: In humility, we should recognize that we share the same struggles and sinful patterns as the Israelites. And in awe, we should also recognize that God is more gracious and patient with us than we could ever imagine. When God takes us through the wilderness, when we enter pain and suffering, we have the choice to surrender ourselves to Him or go our own way. He has called us to trust His provision, knowing that He will satisfy and sanctify our hearts. What greater evidence do we need that He is for us than the cross of Jesus, where the Rock was struck so that new life might flow for our salvation and eternal life?

READ the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 79), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

Because we have experienced God’s grace through the striking of His Son, we receive God’s faithful provision for our daily needs with gratitude as we testify of His kindness to others so that they too may come to trust in Him.

- In what areas of your life will you trust God for His provision instead of trusting in your own effort?
- What are some ways your group can help meet the needs of others in your community as a way to point them to the greater provision of Christ?
- How will you demonstrate God’s kindness this week so that others might come to trust in Jesus or be strengthened in their faith?

CLOSE IN PRAYER: Father, You are gracious even when circumstances are difficult for Your people. Help us to trust in Your goodness in our trials. Thank You for pouring out Your grace upon us through the sending of Your Son, Jesus, to provide for our redemption. Help us to live with gratitude as we attest to Your kindness.

PACK ITEM 9: SURRENDER: Cut out these bookmarks and pass them out to group members to remind them that our strength for obedience in faith comes from God Himself.

INSTRUCT: As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the Daily Study devotions in their DDG (pp. 80-82), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use Encourage One Another (p. 83) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.
Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage your group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The Daily Study devotions in the DDG (pp. 80-82) will help group members get into God’s Word and study it for themselves. Encourage One Another (p. 83) will help group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 80-82) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.

- Share the following idea from the devotion for Day 3 as a part of point 1 in the session: We are to be grateful to God for His mercy, the mercy that falls freely from heaven that we depend on so greatly every morning.

Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God’s Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- Day 2: “The Israelites’ memory was amazingly short, but thankfully God’s love and patience are even more amazingly long.”

- Day 5: “We are called to learn from the failings and faithfulness of God’s people who have gone before us.”

Visit www.GospelProject.com/Blog for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God’s Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the group member’s DDG (p. 83) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using The Gospel Project in their groups.

- Encourage group members to consider tangible ways they can reflect God’s gracious nature by blessing others in their time of need.

- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.
Additional Commentary

Point 1: God provides for His people in their time of need (Ex. 16:2-4).

“During the time between the exodus and the giving of the covenant at Sinai, the Lord and Israel tested each other, the Lord looking to see whether or not the Israelites would trust him and obey him after experiencing all his efforts on their behalf. The Israelites were attempting to put God in the position of meeting their demands. In the process of these experiments, dominant qualities and values of both are displayed (v. 4; 15:25-26; 17:2,7; 20:20; cp. Num. 14:22; Ps. 78:17-22). Follow my instructions is literally, ‘walk in my instructions.’ Since walking is the most common way for humans to move around, it is good terminology for talking about conduct of life (18:20; Lev. 18:4; Deut. 5:33; 8:6; Prov. 1:15; 10:9; Eph. 2:10; 4:1).”

“Over and over we read about Israel’s ‘grumbling’ (vv. 2,7,8,11). Complaining is a serious sin, more serious than you might think. (See 1 Cor. 10:1-12. Notice the sins mentioned there.) Paul told the church in Philippi, ‘Do everything without grumbling and arguing’ (Phil. 2:14). What did the children of Israel complain about? They grumbled under Pharaoh (Ex. 2:23). They grumbled at the Red Sea (14:11-12). They grumbled at Marah (15:23-24). They grumbled about their leaders (16:2-3; 17:3-4; also Num. 11). God just did a miracle turning bitter water into sweet water; He showed Israel that He would care for them; yet they still complained. What would you have done if you had brought out the people from Egypt and they began to murmur, ‘[In Egypt] we sat by pots of meat’? I would have been angry.”

Point 2: God provides for His people despite their disobedience (Ex. 16:13-20).

“Every year at Thanksgiving, pastors caution us not to commit the sin of ingratitude. One pastor described ingratitude as the most common sin of omission. Today’s Bible readers may find it remarkable that the Israelites would so soon forget God’s great act of deliverance. Forgetfulness and ingratitude are always serious sins for God’s people then and now. Still, believers today can empathize with these hot, hungry folks. Yes, God had saved them from Egypt, but saved them for what? In the trials of the moment, they forgot God’s marvelous promise to bring them to a ‘land flowing with milk and honey’ (13:5). In the face of hardship, they wavered in their faith.”

“fine, flake-like thing. The manna seems to have been similar to a honey-like secretion of insects that infested the tamarisk plants of the area (called ‘manna’ by the Arabs). It solidifies in the cold desert nights, but must be gathered early. If this is the manna, the miracle would be God’s control of the amount. The amount gathered is an omer per man, about two quarts, though a related Arabic word means a cupful, and perhaps this is the meaning here.”
**Point 3:** God provides for His people in unexpected ways (Ex. 17:3-6; 1 Cor. 10:1-4).

“I will stand before you there on the rock.” A further example of the Lord’s promise to Moses, ‘I will be with you’ (3:12). The Lord’s presence presumably was manifested in the pillar of cloud (see 13:21-22), providing protection for Moses from the quarreling people of Israel, but also as a demonstration of God’s power, producing fear and awe among the people. The trustworthiness of God’s promise to provide for his people is dramatically demonstrated, as Moses obeys God’s command to strike the rock and the Lord provides water for his people. In light of God’s promise to stand there ‘on the rock,’ some interpreters see a close identification between the presence of God and the rock itself. The command, **you shall strike the rock**, is thus understood to be God’s command to Moses to strike God himself, with the result that God himself is the source of the life-giving water that flowed from the rock. This incident probably provides the background in the NT when Paul says ‘the rock was Jesus’ (1 Cor. 10:4; see Num. 20:2-13).”

“This incident is taken as a warning for future generations (see Ps. 95:7-10). The writer of the book of Hebrews also refers to it: ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the wilderness, where your ancestors tested me and tried me, though for forty years they saw what I did. This is why I was angry with that generation’ (Heb. 3:7-10). We too have experienced the Lord’s gracious salvation and provision, yet we often forget his instructions and go after our own selfish desires. We tend to allow our perceived needs to take centre stage and grumble when they are not gratified immediately. Like the Israelites, we often focus on things that haven’t gone our way while forgetting to count all the blessings we have already received.”

“Exasperated by the people’s lack of faith, Moses cries out, What am I to do with these people? (17:4). God replies, telling him to go ahead of the people with the elders and strike the rock at Horeb with his rod (17:6). This use of the rod with which Moses has already struck the Nile serves to remind the people and the elders, who seem to be regretting ever having left Egypt, of what God had done for them in the past (17:5). Moses obeys God and the water flows in abundance.”

**References**
As Genesis winds down, we encounter Joseph, one of Abraham’s great grandsons, and see that God’s promises are not always easy for His people. But through Joseph’s difficulties, we encounter the vital concept of redemption. His life was one of setbacks, frustration, and disappointment. But all the while, we see that God was at work through Joseph’s adversity, not despite it. God brought about redemption for Joseph and his family: God is always bringing glory to Himself and good to His people through their hardships, even by overriding their sins.

Then as we move from Genesis to Exodus, we pass over nearly four hundred years to a time when God’s people are enslaved. The stage is set for an even greater display of God’s desire and ability to redeem His people. When they cry out to God for deliverance from their slavery in Egypt, He provides a rescuer in Moses to free His people and to provide for them.

God’s deliverance of Joseph and the nation of Israel were the early stages of a beautiful crescendo of God’s plan to redeem His people that culminated in Christ Jesus. In Him we have experienced redemption from the slavery of sin and death. As we study these sessions, let us pray that the Holy Spirit stirs our hearts anew so that we are captivated by the love, grace, and mercy of God made known to us in our redemption through Christ so we can share Him with others.
Matt Chandler (unit 4, sessions 4-6; unit 5, session 1) is a Lead Pastor at The Village Church, president of Acts 29, and author of several books, including *Take Heart: Christian Courage in the Age of Unbelief*. Matt and his wife, Lauren, have three children: Audrey, Reid, and Norah.

Jennifer Grisham (unit 6, sessions 1-2) serves as managing editor and administrator at Doxology & Theology. She’s a graduate of Baylor University and is currently pursuing a master’s degree at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Andrew Hall (unit 6, session 3) is the Lead Pastor of Community Bible Church, located in Ilderton, Ontario, Canada. He is a graduate from Southern Seminary. He and his wife, Melanie, have four children: Noelle, Ava, Calvin, and Brita.

Pat Hood (unit 5, sessions 2-3) is the Senior Pastor at LifePoint Church in Tennessee. He and his wife, Amy, have five children. Pat is the author of *The Sending Church*, which challenges every church to send and every Christian to live sent.

Sung Jin Park (Christmas session) and his wife, Alice, have three kids. He is Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and earned a PhD from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

David Roark (unit 4, sessions 4-6; unit 5, session 1) is the Communications and Resources Director at The Village Church and writes on faith and culture in notable publications. He and his wife, Taylor, have two daughters: Leigh and Lainey.

Robert Smith Jr. (unit 4, sessions 1-3), PhD, is the Charles T. Carter Baptist Chair of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School. He is the author of *Doctrine That Dances* and *The Oasis of God*. He is married to Wanda Taylor-Smith (PhD), and they have four adult children with one in heaven.