

Surviving The Wilderness

GOD, WHERE ARE YOU?

Job 23:8-10 NKJV - ⁸ “Look, I go forward, but He is not *there*, And backward, **but I cannot perceive Him**;

⁹ When He works on the left hand, I cannot behold *Him*; When He turns to the right hand, **I cannot see *Him***.

¹⁰ But He knows the way that I take; **When He has tested me**, I shall come forth as gold.

- **Is this your heart’s cry?** You long to hear from God but all you sense is silence. In frustration, you remember the time you merely whispered His name and His presence was immediately there.
- **Now in the stillness** you want to shout, **“God, where are You?”** Welcome to the wilderness!
- **You are in good company ...** Moses, Joseph, David, Job, even Jesus.
- **The procession of travelers is long**, for the wilderness is a necessary season in the life of every child of God.
- **It cannot be bypassed**, for **the Promised Land cannot be reached without passing through the wilderness!**

Understanding the wilderness is absolutely crucial to your spiritual survival.

1 Chronicles 12:32 NIV - ³² from Issachar, **men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do**—200 chiefs, with all their relatives under their command;

Ecclesiastes 3:1 NKJV - **Everything Has Its Time** - To everything *there is* a season, A time for every purpose under heaven:

Luke 12:56 NIV - ⁵⁶ Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don’t know how to interpret this present time?

- **Jesus rebuked the multitudes** because they looked for the wrong thing at the wrong time.
- A farmer must understand the purpose of the seasons in order for his crop to benefit fully from God’s plan.

Many Christians behave without wisdom when they enter the wilderness season:

- **Constantly searching for an escape route -**
- They unwittingly **prolong their time in the wilderness.**

The wilderness is not negative for those who obey God!

- **God's purpose in leading Israel to the wilderness was to test, train and prepare them to be sanctified warriors.**
- **But instead, the Israelites erroneously perceived the wilderness as punishment, so they murmured, complained and lusted constantly.**

What was to have been **a brief wilderness journey** became **a *lifetime experience***.

1. The wilderness **may be a time of correction, it is not a time of disapproval.**

Luke 4:1 NIV - Jesus Is Tested in the Wilderness - Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan (*AFTER HIS BAPTISM*), **and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,**

2. **God doesn't "set us on the shelf," but works in our lives all the way through the wilderness.**

Deuteronomy 8:2 - And you shall remember that ***the Lord your God led you all the way*** these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.

3. **The wilderness is not a place of defeat to those who obey God.**

Under instruction from the Lord, Israel defeated the Amorites (Number 21), the Midianites (Numbers 31), and the people of Bashan (Numbers 21) ***while wandering in the wilderness.***

If God's purpose was for them to experience defeat, He wouldn't have told them to defend their position!

THE WILDERNESS IS NOT GOD'S REJECTION OF YOU BUT HIS PREPARATION OF YOU!

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WILDERNESS:

1. **You cannot sense God's presence** (don't misunderstand and think you have missed God).

- A newborn child gets more attention, but struggles (i.e. feeding oneself) are part of maturity.
 - As we grow, the level of assistance we receive ***changes to encourage our growth.***
2. **You appear to be going in the opposite direction of your dreams and God's promises.**
- You perceive no growth, you may feel you are regressing, you may feel unloved or ignored.
 - ***But you are not!***
 - **God is constantly working for your good behind the scenes.**
3. **You receive what you NEED (daily bread), not what you WANT.**
- **God only provides what you need to survive the wilderness.**
 - We call this "***LACK,***" but our wants ***are not needs!***
 - Neither should a season of "***abundance***" be viewed as ***God's permission to advance your agenda!***

HOW DOES GOD TEST US?

Deuteronomy 8:3 NKJV - ³ So He humbled you, ***allowed you to hunger***, and ***fed you with manna*** which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every *word* that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.

Israel never missed a meal, but ***it was the same menu for 40 years!***

- Their clothes and shoes never wore out, but their wardrobe was quite outdated after 40 years!
- And the scenery stayed the same every single day!
- That's how God tests us - we get only ***what our flesh NEEDS,***
- **NOT what it WANTS.**
- They were **HUNGRY** ***because God removed what they DESIRED.***

Psalm 106:13-15 NKJV - ¹³ They soon forgot His works; They did not wait for His counsel, ¹⁴ But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, And tested God in the desert. ¹⁵ And ***He gave them their request,*** But ***sent leanness into their soul.***

The “leanness of soul” made them unable to pass God’s test, and **ultimately unable to enter the Promised Land**.

- **God still wants to know** *whether His people will seek His face* (relationship)
- Or just **His hand** (provision).
- If you seek only His hand, **you may not recognize His face**.

Many in the church are happy as long as they get what they want from God

- But upon entering dry times,
- The motive of their hearts is revealed.
- **Anytime *the focus is self*, complaining begins.**

Paul understood this principle of “**need vs. want.**”

Philippians 4:11-13 NIV - ¹¹I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹²I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³***I can do all this through him who gives me strength.***

DO YOU GET EXCITED ABOUT GOD’S WAYS, OR JUST HIS WORKS?

In the wilderness, the fruit of the Spirit is cultivated, watered by a desire to know Him!

Isaiah 43:18-19 NIV - ¹⁸“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. ¹⁹See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? **I am making a way in the wilderness** and streams in the wasteland.

Changes that brings us closer to the Lord are not always easy, but they are always good.

Luke 5:37-39 NIV - ³⁷ And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. ³⁸ No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. ³⁹ And no one after drinking old wine **wants** the new, for they say, “The old is better.”

There is a reason for your wilderness, which you perceive as the absence of His presence.

CLOSE:

God is preparing a new wineskin (you!) for a fresh move of His Spirit!

Wineskins in Jesus' day were made of sheepskin, ***which were flexible and pliable*** when the wine was first put in.

- They **stretched easily** and would yield **without resistance**.
- However, as the years went by, the atmosphere would absorb all the moisture out of the wineskin, ***leaving it brittle and hard***.

Now if the wine was poured out and new wine poured in,

- **The skin could handle neither the weight of the new wine nor the fermentation process,**
- **Because it was now rigid and brittle and could break easily.**

What they did was -

- Soak the skin in water for several days
- And then rub olive oil on it.
- **That made it flexible and pliable again.**

But **in order to rejuvenate the old wineskin, they had to pour out the old wine!**

That meant no wine in the vessel –

- **No tangible presence of God!**
- **A wilderness!**

The reason God withdraws His presence **is to cause you to seek Him**

- **For seeking makes you flexible and pliable again,**
- **Ready for a move of His Spirit!**

PRAISE TEAM:

No man who is used to the old wine (habitual prayer, worship, etc.) *will immediately*** desire the new wine.**

Therefore, **God allows us to go through a period of NO WINE!**

- **We then become very thirsty for the NEW WINE!**

Psalm 63:1-2 NKJV - Joy in the Fellowship of God - A Psalm of David when he was in the wilderness of Judah.

63 O God, You *are* my God; Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You In a dry and thirsty land Where there is no water.

²So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory.