

Are You in the Wilderness? – Dan Hitz

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Do not forget that he [the Lord] led you through the great and terrifying wilderness with its poisonous snakes and scorpions, where it was so hot and dry. He gave you water from the rock! He fed you with manna in the wilderness, a food unknown to your ancestors. He did this to humble you and test you for your own good. – Moses in Deuteronomy 8:15-16 [NLT]

I will never fail you. I will never abandon you. – God in Hebrews 13:5b [NLT]

There are times when we are truly thankful for all that the Lord has done in our hearts, but the truth is that there are also times when we feel like we can't take one more disappointment. Some of us currently feel like we're in a miserable wasteland. Moses, the one whom the Lord chose to lead His people through the wilderness, made no bones about the fact that it was a "great and terrifying wilderness" full of "poisonous snakes and scorpions". Since this is written in Scripture, I'm sure even the Lord would agree with his assessment.



The truth is that all of us go through a wilderness season from time to time – the death of a loved one, a job loss, the crash of a dream, even the valley of depression. It is during these seasons that we may begin to wonder where God is. That is why I included the second Scripture above, the Lord will NEVER fail us and He will NEVER abandon us. Since He is sovereign He could have kept us from going through the wilderness. Why didn't He? Why does He allow all these bad things to happen to us? Rather than trying to figure out why bad things happen to good people and trying to pacify our insecurities in the unknown with trite answers like, "We live in a fallen world", I wanted to use this newsletter to look at God's intent for the wilderness. Why does He allow – or even lead us into – the wilderness? In Deuteronomy 8, Moses concludes that God leads us into the wilderness to humble us, to test us, and to ultimately use the season for our own eternal good.

In short, the Lord who promises to never fail us and never abandon us leads us into the wilderness to build an intimate relationship with us and to teach us to be utterly dependent upon Him. The Israelites knew the terror of the wilderness in Exodus 14 when they were trapped between the Egyptian army and the Red Sea. They knew the desperation of the wilderness in Exodus 15 when they were dying of thirst and came upon the waters of Marah. I can imagine their excitement when it looked like God "came through" after three days and provided water for them to drink. I can also imagine their thoughts that "the Lord failed us again" when they took the first few sips of that water and found them too bitter to drink. How often in our lives do we cry out to the Lord for help and it seems like His answer to us makes matters much worse? Like the Israelites, we often get angry with the Lord and accuse Him of trying to make us miserable. Or worse, we accuse Him of trying to taunt us or even kill us. Yet, in both of these situations,

the Lord miraculously took care of the problem and supernaturally provided exactly what they needed. He didn't ignore them and allow the Egyptian army to wipe them out. The Lord provided a way of escape in an impossible situation and destroyed the very enemy that looked like they were prevailing over them. The Lord didn't torment the Israelites with a huge body of undrinkable water as they continued to thirst. He had Moses toss a tree [NKJV] into the water as a prophetic foreshadowing of how Jesus would accept His death on the cross to turn our bitterness sweet and save us from our sin.

It is during the wilderness times of our lives when we see absolutely no hope, that the Lord wants us to come to Him and ask Him for help. Even though we might reference John 15:5 and say "without Him we can do nothing", it takes the wilderness to show us the full truth of this Scripture. Exodus 33 tells how Moses would set up his tent outside the camp and he called it the "tent of meeting". Anyone who wanted to make a request of the Lord could go to the tent of meeting and ask their request. In the middle of our "great and terrifying wilderness" the Lord invites us to come to the tent of meeting and ask Him for help. Unlike the Israelites, we have direct access into His presence and can "come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most" [Hebrews 4:16 NLT]. It is in our times of despair that we can come to our Heavenly Father and find out that He really does care, and He really is active in our lives. He doesn't usually turn our wilderness into a beautiful day at the beach in Hawaii, but He ALWAYS hears our hearts and leads us into the next step for the next portion of our journey. It is when we humble our hearts in the middle of the "great and terrifying wilderness" that we learn of the faithful love of our Heavenly Father who truly NEVER fails us and NEVER abandons us. It is then that we learn to come out of the wilderness leaning on our beloved [Song of Songs 8:5].



As we focus on the life of Jesus, we can meditate on the truth that He also experienced the "great and terrifying wilderness" while He was on the earth. He was born into Roman captivity and spent the first few years of his life as a refugee in Egypt. Immediately after His baptism where he heard the words, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," He was led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil [Matthew 3 and 4]. It was during His times in the wilderness that He demonstrated the totality of His

trust in the Father. It was during His most intense wilderness season that He paid the ultimate penalty for our sins through His death on the cross. Because Jesus was victorious in His wilderness, we can come boldly to our Heavenly Father and ask Him for help in our time of need. There we learn of our Father's great love for us as He equips us as His beloved sons and daughters to walk with Him through our wilderness. There we learn that He isn't trying to destroy us. He is transforming us into the very image of His Son, Jesus.

May you experience the fullness of the Father's love.

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