

A JOURNEY OF ENCOUNTER



Chapter 10:

Wilderness wanderings - learning to trust and obey

Based on Matthew 4:1-11; Exodus 13:17-18; 17: 1-7; Hebrews 4:12; Ephesians 6:17; John 10:10

This month's content is written by Major Jill Miller, retired officer and member of the Prayer Strategy Team.

INSPIRE

It is almost a year since this strange 'Covid reality' turned our lives upside-down. It has been almost a year of living under unusual restrictions and having to learn different ways of worshipping together. For some, it has been almost a year since they have hugged another human being. This certainly has been a long haul.

How are you doing, and what have you learnt? Which strategies have you developed to help you stay sane and healthy? In our 'Into the Wild' resources this month, we discover the three strategies Jesus used when he was in the wilderness. These strategies helped to keep him safe from the predations of fear, doubt and confusion; they helped defeat the enemy and allowed Jesus to grow and flourish through that time of testing, so he could step out in the power of the Spirit.

Wildernesses don't have to deplete us. They can be places of growth and renewal.

Read alone or with a friend, reflect on the discussion questions over the phone with someone or in an online small group / Bible study, try the prayer activities ... and see what happens when you turn to God in the wilderness.

If you'd like to receive regular updates throughout the 'Into the Wild' journey over the coming year, including invitations to our regular Zoom prayer gatherings, [sign up here](#).



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EXPLORE

Introduction

Have you ever been through what is called a 'wilderness experience', a time of spiritual drought or a tough time when you felt disconnected or lacked encouragement? Perhaps you have felt under spiritual attack, or faced temptation and believed you were being tested.

It is not a pleasant place to be, and during the past year many of us may have felt some of the above as we have faced self-isolation, our halls and churches closed for worship, no fellowship with our corps/church family and basic spiritual loneliness.

The Bible has much to teach us about wilderness experiences, and this month we are looking at two wilderness stories.

The Children of Israel

Perhaps the most famous wilderness story concerns the Children of Israel who wandered in the desert for 40 years. God set his people free from the Egyptians and led them to the Promised Land, but it involved a journey through the desert. The journey was long and hard, but God was constantly with his people. He did not leave them or abandon them. God planned their journey, miraculously leading them through the Red Sea. God protected them - a pillar of cloud by day to give shade and a pillar of fire by night to give light. God delivered them in battle and gave them victory. He fed and watered them with manna from Heaven and with water struck from a rock.

Yet despite all that, the Children of Israel grumbled and complained, disobeyed and defied God. Though Moses tried his best to mediate, they ended up prolonging their own wilderness experience because they simply didn't trust that God knew best.

Sometimes we think we know best. We hear what God is saying but we go our own way. We see evidence of God's guiding and blessings, yet we choose another path. Wildernesses may be a necessary discomfort on our journey through life with God, but they are more bearable and far more fruitful when we stop fighting against him and let him lead and provide for us.



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Jesus

Perhaps the second most famous wilderness story in the Bible is about Jesus. He spent 40 days in the desert - five weeks and five days of solitude, danger, testing and temptation. When he was led into the desert, he was full of the Holy Spirit. He had just been baptised in the Jordan and God had spoken words of authority and confirmation over him. This was to be the beginning of Jesus fulfilling his destiny, but first he was to endure a wilderness experience.

Crises often come just when it feels like everything is going well for us. Suddenly it's as though the rug has been pulled out from under our feet. Confusion, frustration, anger and doubt all crowd into our heads and we find ourselves questioning God. Temptations come, and we find ourselves contemplating actions we know will go against what God knows is best for us. How do we respond? How did Jesus respond to the temptations he faced in that desert place?

Like the Israelites, Jesus had to trust his Father God, listen to his words and be obedient to him. Each time Satan tempted him, he stuck to that strategy: putting his trust in his Father, quoting his words and doing what he knew his Father would want him to do. Those actions resulted in Satan leaving him.

Deepen

When we're walking through a wilderness, it's hard to trust God because it feels like he is being unfair by allowing bad stuff to happen to us. Hard though it may be, the choice to trust is the first step, just as it was for the Israelites and for Jesus.

The second strategy is to know and speak out the word of God. We may not have one-on-one conversations with Satan in the middle of our wildernesses, but the Bible tells us that the enemy lies, steals and kills (John 10:10), and we know that fear, disappointment, self-pity and unbelief can all feel very real - shouting so loudly that we start to doubt God and his goodness. It is important to learn to recognise the different voices we hear, and the Bible can really help with that.

The book of Hebrews compares the word of God to a sword (Hebrews 4:12), and Ephesians 6:17 says that that sword of the Spirit is to be used in spiritual warfare. Knowing Scripture can help us in times of testing because it speaks the truth about God to us and dislodges our darkest thoughts, shouting hope into our hearts.

Satan's aim was to tempt Jesus to stop trusting God, to doubt his word and to disobey him. He knew that would destroy Jesus' fellowship with the Father and steal his destiny. But Jesus fully trusted in God and his word, and submitted to him in total obedience ... and something happened to him in that wilderness place.



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Jesus resisted the temptation to turn stones into bread to satisfy his own hunger, only to find himself feeding five thousand people later in his ministry, with nothing but five loaves and two fish. What he endured in that wilderness empowered him for what was to come. Jesus went into the desert led by the Spirit and came out of the desert in the power of the Spirit.

Conclusion

God takes us through the wilderness to bring us closer to him. There are times when we feel alone, abandoned, frightened and lost - yet God is with us always, to the end of the age. So let's keep praying and seeking God, let's keep giving and serving, and let's stay faithful.

A truth to hold on to

God uses wildernesses to fill us with the Spirit.

Challenge

- Learn a Bible verse to speak out in times when it is hard to trust God..

WATCH

This month, Lyndall Bywater interviews Major Christine Kingscott, who takes up her new appointment as Assistant Secretary for Spiritual Life Development in March and will take over co-ordinating the SA UKI Territory Prayer Network. Chris talks about her hopes, her prayers and her wilder moments ...

[Watch this video here](#)



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DISCUSS

- What do you find most hinders your worship at the moment?
- What has strengthened your relationship with God during the past year?
- How do you maintain contact with members of your corps/church family?
- What have you found helpful in developing a habit of reading the Bible regularly?
- What is your feeling about fasting and prayer? Have you tried it; and if so, was it helpful?
- How might the tempter try to attack us when we take steps of faith and obedience?
- How does today's 'fake news' affect our thinking and our faith?

PRAY

1. His provision

In the song 'His Provision' (SASB 316) we find words of comfort and hope. Read through the words and listen to the song if you can. Use this as a means of recognising God's provision for you, and give thanks.

At the moment of my weakness,
When my need for power is plain,
And my own strength is exhausted once again,
Then my Lord has made provision for the day of my despair,
And his precious Holy Spirit hears my prayer, my prayer.

When the darkness falls around me,
When bewildered and afraid,
When I feel the most deserted and betrayed,
Then my every need is answered by God's providential care
And his precious Holy Spirit hears my prayer, my prayer.

Nothing now can rob God's servant
Of the peace that he bequeaths,
Nothing take away the strength his presence breathes.
Of the everlasting arms of love I'm daily made aware,
And his precious Holy Spirit hears my prayer, my prayer.

2. Combating loneliness

Make a list of the people you know who live alone and pray for them, asking God to break through their loneliness with his love. Drop them a card or give them a call, asking how they are and assuring them of your prayer.



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3. Soak in Scripture

Reading familiar and favourite Scripture can reassure us when we feel tempted. Make a notebook of your favourite verses and pray through the words, knowing that God has promised to be with you always.

4. Fasting and prayer

If it is safe to do so, try fasting and prayer, especially if you are praying for something specific. Fasting can help us focus on God, and can be a way of demonstrating our commitment and determination to see breakthrough in a particular situation.

If it is inadvisable to fast food, then think about fasting something else, like coffee, TV or social media.

WEBSITE AND CONTACT EMAIL

For resources and sign up: www.salvationarmy.org.uk/resources/into-the-wild

Email Prayer Network: sprayernetwork@salvationarmy.org.uk



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