

Talk It Over

God With Us (Week 2) In The Wilderness

SMALL TALK

1. Have you ever spent time in a national park or other wilderness area? Where? What did you like about it?

VIEWPOINT

2. **READ 1 Kings 19:3-12.** What do you think God is trying to communicate to Elijah? To us?

GETTING PERSONAL

3. Do you agree with this statement, "Your deepest need becomes a gift when it drives you to depend on God."? Have you ever experienced this gift? Can you share your story?
4. What are some ways you have experienced God's presence in the past?
5. What can you do to discover God's provision and rest during this time in your life?
6. How did God communicate to Elijah? How about you? How can you adjust your life to hear from Him?

MAKING PROGRESS

7. One of our core statements is: "Don't Do Life Alone" How might you practice waiting on God this week? Where and when will you be still enough and quiet enough to hear a quiet whisper?

[Video Intro, then series title, then message title.]

In The Wilderness

By Jim Hammond

Series: Week 2-God Is With Us

Matthew 1:23 (NLT) “Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’”

We enjoy him on the mountaintops; We get to know him in the valleys.

Focus: We are trained by him in wilderness.

Throughout the Bible the **Wilderness** serves as a metaphor for all of our lives.

It becomes a metaphor for those times we experience trials, hardship, wandering, and waiting. It often includes feeling lost, confused, and spiritually dry, or thirsty.

This theme is huge in the post Exodus experience with 40 years in the wilderness before entering the promised land.

The wilderness theme is picked up in the lives of the prophets.

The wilderness theme is picked up in Jesus' life. We will look at these in a moment.

This theme is the theme of every believer when we are being trained by God.

Generically, it describes our experience before we enter into our promised inheritance which is heaven.

What does it feel like?

Wandering in the wilderness feels like you are not sure what you should do next?

- It might feel like not being sure whether you should stay in your job? Or if you are in transition, what job is the right job for you.
- It might feel like not being sure whether you should go back to school to be trained in a whole new career path. Do I take out a loan? How do I do that? It feels like you are not sure. It feels like there is something better ahead, but you don't know how to get there.
- It feels like you don't know whether to continue to rent and continue to pour out all that money and build no equity. It feels like someday you will exercise your faith to step out a purchase, but you don't know when, or how? It feels like wandering around.

- It might feel like you are dating a guy that you like, and you want to get married, but he never brings up that subject. You pray and pray, and you hope that someday it will be a "happily ever after relationship" like you have always dreamed about, but you honestly don't know whether to call it quits on this guy, or keep waiting.
- Wandering in the wilderness feels like you are stuck. You feel like you are waiting. You don't even know what exactly you are waiting for, or for how long. You feel anxious. You might even feel paralyzed. You feel stuck in the wilderness.

It is very interesting that you are going through this actually, because this experience of wilderness often immediately follows on the heels of a completely different kind of experience. It usually follows after the mountaintop experience.

In the case of the Exodus, it follows the dramatic events of God's powerfully outstretched hand miraculously releasing his people from bondage. Many people experience the mountaintop experience of being saved by God, even miraculously, and this is followed up by the wilderness experience. You begin questioning the goodness of God. That was what the Israelites did. People are tempted in the wilderness. People are tested there. That is precisely the point of the wilderness experience. What are you going to do with that?

Wilderness often follows mountaintops.

Jesus was baptized. It was a mountaintop experience for him. But at once he was driven into **wilderness** and tempted for 40 days.

Mark 1:12 (ESV) ^{12} The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.

It feels like you didn't have a choice. Sometimes God **drives, compels, leads us** into periods of testing, and we feel like we had no choice in the matter.

The wilderness metaphor comes from the desert wilderness. It isn't the Sierra's, or foothills of the Rockies, with peaceful meadows, and streams, and lakes, in beautiful alpine forests.

No, it is harsh and dry and empty, a place where you feel confused, and dry, alone, and empty. It feels like your survival is being threatened.

But don't be fooled. This isn't an experience God brings to you in order to hurt you.

I. Your deepest need becomes a GIFT when it drives you to DEPEND on God.

The wilderness however is a place of temptation. We still have a choice. We can choose to be driven away from God and enter into rebellion like many of the Israelites did, prolonging their wilderness experience, or we can choose to be driven by our need to depend on God, and grow stronger for it.

At the end of the 40 years, the now very old Moses explained God's purpose for their experience.

Deuteronomy 8:2 (NIV2011) *Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.*

Elijah learned this principle. God used him in a massive way (on a Mountain by the way), then Elijah falls into depression and desperation, and he flees into the Wilderness.

King Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah did on Mount Carmel. It is a great story. He proves there is no God but God, and that all of Queen Jezebel's prophets and Queen Jezebel's gods are false gods.

Jezebel flips out and sends word to Elijah, and the message is "By this time tomorrow—I will kill you."

1 Kings 19:3-4 (NIV2011) ^{3} *Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, ^{4} while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."*

From Mountaintop to Wilderness... in one day. What's going on here?
"I have had enough, Lord" Elijah reached a tipping point. But how?

He is depleted. Before Jezebel's threat, on the very day before, he ran 15 miles. Then after the threat, his fear led him to travel another 95 miles. He is completely depleted, he has no reserves left. His otherwise sturdy frame is empty. He is in the wilderness, feeling alone, empty, afraid, and depleted. Elijah had had enough, he says so, but God isn't done with him.

II. In the wilderness will we learn to TRUST what God SAYS?

Deuteronomy 8:3 (NIV2011) *He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.*

Just like Elijah, you can handle a lot—until one thing pushes you over the tipping point. In Elijah's case, although he stood down the wicked King for 3 years, and stood down 850 false prophets, one angry and wicked woman pushed him over the edge with just one sentence.

Maybe you can relate. Elijah is tired. He feels whipped. He's got nothing left. BUT God is with him still, even though he does not feel it. When you don't feel it, will you trust what he says? What do you do when you are that tired?

1 Kings 19:5 (NIV2011) Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat."

[Sometimes the most spiritual thing to do is take a nap!]

1 Kings 19:6 (NIV2011) ^{6} He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

*1 Kings 19:7-8 (NIV2011) ^{7} The angel of the LORD came back **a second time** and touched him and said, [We serve a God of 2nd Chances.]*

"Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." ^{8} So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.

*1 Kings 19:11-12 (NIV2011) ^{11} The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but **the LORD was not in the wind**. After the wind there was an earthquake, **but the LORD was not in the earthquake.** ^{12} After the earthquake came a fire, **but the LORD was not in the fire**. And after the fire came **a gentle whisper**.*

III. God meets our need with a WHISPER.

When we are overwhelmed by stress, and overwhelmed in a wilderness experience.

Why does God's voice seem so quiet?

Why doesn't he speak to us in spectacular and powerful ways?

If he wants me to know him, experience him, trust him, why does he whisper?

He whispers because... He is close.

[Groeshchel Video Clip]

I'd rather be in the wilderness with God than on the mountaintop without him.

Dear God,

I need your whispered assurance that you are here with me even in the wilderness. In the wilderness, I feel alone, tired, dry, empty, and confused, but you refresh my soul with a gentle whisper. *We do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from your mouth.* You led me here to humble me and test me. I will trust your word, and your commands. I pray this in Jesus' powerful name. *Immanuel, which means "God is with us."* Yours truly, Amen!