


# In the Wilderness

By Mary Kane

 One of my favorite things to do is to take a walk by myself in the wilderness. I love to walk in the early morning, just after the sun has risen. There is something special about walking in the morning that is missing from walking in the afternoon.

Fernwood Nature center is a quick drive from my house. Many summer mornings will find me hiking the trails at Fernwood before the park opens to the public. The silence and the freshness of the morning somehow quiets my soul and rejuvenates my spirit. As I walk and hike, I meet with God; I talk with Him about what is on my heart, pray for my family, myself and others and I work on memorizing Scripture. These times with the Lord are very sweet! I love to meet with Him in the wilderness and I think He loves to meet with me!

**Before we start our study today, please ask please ask the Holy Spirit to fill you afresh and open the eyes of your heart to the truth of the Scriptures.**

The word *wilderness* is used in the Bible about three hundred times; there are seven different Hebrew words and two Greek words for *wilderness*. Wilderness can mean "a plain, desert, dry land, solitary place, barrenness, emptiness, nothingness, a field, solitary."

In the Bible, we discover a few different reasons why people end up in the wilderness. Sometimes people went to the wilderness because God called them; people such as the Hebrew slaves and John the Baptist. Others went to the wilderness because they were forced to seek refuge from their enemies, like David or Hagar. Still, others went to the wilderness because they choose to go there to meet with God, like Jesus. While wandering in the wilderness may not sound like a good thing on the surface, we must remember that God promises to use all things for our good if we love Him and walk according to His purpose.

Sooner or later for one reason or the other, we will all end up in the wilderness. Let's take a look into Scripture and learn how we can benefit from our times in the wilderness.

**Please read Exodus 3:1-20.**

**Where was God planning to take the Hebrew people?**

He planned to take them to a good land—a land flowing with milk and honey!

**In order to begin this journey, where did they first have to meet with God?**

They had to meet with Him in the wilderness. Verse 18 states that they were planning a “three days’ journey” into the wilderness. The Hebrew word for *journey* used in this verse is one you may be familiar with, *derek*, which means “a road, a way, a path, a manner of life, a habit, a course of life.” When we want to walk closer to God; to experience a greater measure of His Presence in our lives, we will need to establish some new “habits” and try a different “manner of life.”

**What new habits do you need to institute in order to walk closer with God?**

I wondered why God chose to send His people “three days” into the wilderness. I looked up the phrase “three days” to see if I could discover anything significant. The BLB cited that the number *three* is a “symbolic number that signifies completeness.” God sent darkness on the land of Egypt for three days, the Israelites traveled three days into the wilderness and found no water, the Israelites waited for three days beside the Jordan River before proceeding into the Promised Land; many other examples using the number *three* can be found in the New and Old Testament. It is my opinion that God chose a three day journey to test the resolve of the Israelites; did they really want to walk with God? A

quick one day journey would not require great sacrifice or commitment. God wanted to know if the hearts of His people were completely committed to Him.

The word used in this section of Scripture for *wilderness* is *midbar* which means “wilderness, pasture, and uninhabited land.” Interestingly, *midbar* is derived from the primitive root word *dabar* which means “to talk.” I’d like to suggest that sometimes God may lead us to the wilderness that He may talk to us! In the middle of nowhere, away from our cell phones, televisions and computers, God may finally have our complete, undivided attention.

Now please read Exodus 13:17-22.

**While His people were in the wilderness, what did God do (verse 21)?**

The people of Israel were not aimlessly wandering in the desert—God was leading them. God was leading them out of a place that was inundated with idolatry and sin, to a place of purity, truth and fellowship with Him.

**What might God be leading you out of, that you might have greater fellowship with Him?**

When God moves you from where you were comfortable to the wilderness, it’s because He’s calling you to a deeper level of relationship with Him. He wants to manifest Himself to you in a different way and reveal other parts of His character.

Please read the following verses: Exodus 16:2-4, Exodus 17:3-6 and Deuteronomy 8:4.

**What did God reveal about Himself in these verses?**

God showed His people that He was more than able to provide for them in the vast nothingness of the wilderness. Lack of resources is nothing for the God who can create *ex nihilo* (Latin for *out of nothing*). Bread from heaven...water from rocks...clothing that lasts for forty years. As God miraculously provided for the Hebrews in their wilderness wanderings, He will provide for you.

As we just learned, sometimes we go to the wilderness because God calls us there, but other times we end up in the wilderness because others force us there. In the Old Testament, Saul forced David to seek shelter in the wilderness (if you are unfamiliar with the chronicle of Saul and David, please read 1 Samuel 18-20). The Book of psalms records how David felt about his forced wilderness wanderings.

**Please read Psalm 63.**

**List all the ways that David benefited from his time in the wilderness:**

1. He developed a greater thirst for the Lord (verse 1)!
2. He found reason to praise the Lord (verse 3).
3. He found satisfaction and joy in the Lord (verse 5).
4. He developed a closer walk with the Lord (verse 8).

**Have you ever been forced to the *wilderness* by the actions of others?**

**How have you benefited from these wilderness wanderings?**

Isn't it encouraging to know that we can derive great benefit from the times that we are forced into the wilderness with God? As Joseph learned, what others mean for evil, God means for our good.

**To recap, please list the first two reasons why we can end up in the wilderness:**

Finally, we reach our third reason: Sometimes we choose to go into the wilderness to meet with God.

Please read Luke 5:15-16 and Matthew 14:13, 22-23.

**What did Jesus often do?**

**Why did He often withdraw into the wilderness to pray?**

Jesus withdrew to the wilderness, by His own choice because He knew He needed to rest and refuel by being in the Presence of His Father. Stress is an illness we all suffer from in the twenty-first century. In His infinite knowledge and foresight, two thousand years ago, God included the antidote for modern day stress in His Word: "Come to me all who labor and are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest." As this passage from Matthew 11:28 states, we can alleviate much of our stress by withdrawing from the hustle and bustle of life to a quiet place and spending time in the Presence of the Lord.

As we learned earlier in this study, the word *wilderness* means “a solitary or lonely place.” I live in an area where I can easily get away to some quiet lonely places in the woods or on the beaches of Lake Michigan. Some of you may not have that advantage.

**If you live in a big city and the woods is not an option, where can you go to have some alone time with the Lord?**

Perhaps a table at your favorite café or a nook in your local library may be a good place for a meeting with God. If you have little ones at home, your *wilderness time* with God may take place during nap time, on your own back porch. It’s not so much that you have to go to the country or the mountains to get alone with the Lord (although I believe nothing beats a hike in the woods with God) the point is that you spend time alone with Him.

**In Matthew 14:13, 22-23, to what lengths did Jesus go in order to meet with God in the wilderness?**

Did you notice that despite the fact that Jesus was very busy doing the work of the kingdom that He still scheduled time to be with His Father? At times, when faced with a busy day, you may be tempted to skip your Quiet Time in order to allow for more time to complete your to-do list. May I challenge you to do your Quiet Time anyway and trust God to maximize your time? God will bless you for prioritizing Him over your to-do list! May we follow Jesus’ example and not use busyness as an excuse to neglect fellowshiping with our Father.

Now let’s take a moment and apply what we have learned today about wilderness wanderings to our own walks with Christ. Whether it is God, self or others that have brought us to the wilderness, we can expect a few things:

- 1. God will be with you in the wilderness.** You make think that you are wandering alone, but actually He is leading you with a pillar of cloud by day, to shade you and a pillar of fire by night, to warm and protect you. You cannot escape His Presence. "Even there Your hand shall lead me" (Psalm 139:10a).
- 2. God will reveal Himself to you in the wilderness.** God will teach you things in the wilderness about Himself and His character that you will not learn in any other place. You will learn to trust Him in new areas of your life and to greater depths than you previously dared. Among many other things, the children of Israel learned that the God they were following through the wilderness was *Jehovah Rapha*; the *God Who Heals You*. Exodus 15:26.
- 3. God will provide for you in the wilderness.** Bread from heaven, water from rocks, clothes that never wear out (blessing or curse?) ...As God provided for the Hebrews in the wilderness, He will provide for you as well!
- 4. God will do miraculous things for you in the wilderness.** During your wilderness wandering, most likely you will encounter seemingly insurmountable obstacles...insurmountable for man, not God! Continue trusting in the Lord! Sometimes you'll have to wait for Him to part the Red Sea other times He may expect you to first step out in faith and then He'll part the Jordan River. Look for His miracles!
- 5. God will test you in the wilderness.** God will test you: to reveal what is in your heart (Deut. 8:2), so that you may fear Him and not sin against Him (Exodus 20:20), to see if we will walk according to His Word (Exodus 16:4), so that we might do good in the end (Deut. 8:16) and finally, to heal you.
- 6. God will lead you to the Promised Land after the wilderness.** If you are currently in the wilderness, regardless of the reason you are there, God is working to lead you to His Promised Land! Your wilderness wanderings can be a stepping stone to a deeper relationship with God.

**Based on our study today or your own experience, can you think of any other benefits that may come after a time in the wilderness?**

Thank you for doing this study with me! It has been a blessing!

*For the Lord will comfort Zion, He will comfort all her waste places;*

*He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord;*

*Joy and gladness will be found in it, thanksgiving and the voice of melody.*

*Psalm 51:3*

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