

The Purpose of the Wilderness

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Have you ever felt like you were going through a “wilderness” period in your life? You could be experiencing a wilderness time in your marriage, in your career, in your finances or some other area. Many people in the United States as well as other countries around the world are facing tremendous financial struggles right now. Could there possibly be some divine purpose to it?

When God led the children of Israel out of Egypt we see Him performing unprecedented miracles for them by opening the Red Sea and then closing it in on the Egyptian army that was hot on their trail. The very next scene in this drama of Exodus is the entrance of the Israelites into the wilderness. Their assignment was to walk THROUGH the wilderness and straight into the Promised Land which was a place of victory and abundance. God wants each of us to enter the Promised Land of victory and abundance in our marriage, family, careers, ministries and finances but we may face a wilderness before we get there. Like the children of Israel with Moses, many Christians stumble when they find themselves in a wilderness period. God never intended for the Israelites to remain in the wilderness, instead He fully intended for them to pass through it unscathed and enter the Promised Land. Likewise, He has no plans for you to stay there either!

However, it is vital to understand why God led them through the wilderness and how to avoid perishing there like so many others did. In the book of Deuteronomy we find this vital insight about God’s purpose in the wilderness:

...(God) led you through that great and terrible wilderness... that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end... (Deuteronomy 8:15-16)

God’s ultimate plan is “to do you good in the end.” But He is very interested in our heart condition as evidenced by the scripture that says He wanted to humble the Israelites as they passed through the wilderness. Humility has been defined as understanding who God is and who we are not. In other words, it is coming to the place where we recognize our utter dependence upon God. When people think they don’t need God or that they can handle things themselves, they are in a state of arrogance or pride, the absolute

opposite

of

humility.

Our culture fosters that attitude of self-dependence and independence from God. God's "culture" requires that you trust Him alone. Trusting in "self" is a dangerous heart condition that will be clearly exposed when you enter the wilderness. God allows wilderness experiences to expose what is in our hearts. God knows what is there, but we need to be shown our true heart condition so we can repent and ask God to help us walk in His ways and not our own.

If you have been trying to run your marriage, your family, your career, your finances or any other area of your life in your own strength and without total reliance upon God, you will stumble when you face a wilderness period. The Israelites could not get through the wilderness in their own strength. They were desperately in need of an attitude of utter dependence upon God as their deliverer and provider. But because they did not have this attitude of reliance or trust in God when the first wilderness trial was upon them (i.e. no water) they grumbled and complained against Moses instead of looking to the Lord who had delivered them out of the Red Sea crisis just days before. (Exodus 15:22-24)

When you are in a wilderness period you will be tempted to grumble against the humans in your life. But whether it be your spouse, your boss, or the corporation you work for, blaming them will not deliver you out of the wilderness you are in. Only humbling yourself before God, trusting Him implicitly, no matter how hopeless things look and obeying His every command will put you in a position to receive the Promised Land's blessings.

The second purpose of the wilderness as seen in Deuteronomy 8:16 is so that God might "test" you. In Deuteronomy 8:2 it expands on that statement by saying:

"...(to) test you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.."

The ultimate test of the wilderness is obedience. Will you obey God when you are under the pressures of the wilderness? The answer to this question will determine whether you will perish in the wilderness or march triumphantly into the Promised Land. An entire generation was doomed to die in the wilderness because they disobeyed God's order to go in and fight the enemies in the Promised Land and take it by force. (Numbers 14: 22-23) Their refusal to trust God and obey Him caused them to forfeit the good things God had planned for them.

Many people forfeit God's Promised Land for their life, for their marriage, or for their future because they decide it is too hard to obey God when things are difficult and they choose to resolve things their own way. The Israelites did the same thing. They listened to the report of the men who went to spy out the Promised Land. Ten of the spies said that there were giants in the land and that there was no way to conquer them.

But two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, told the people that it was an exceedingly good land and that "...the Lord is with us, do not fear them." And "...we are well able to overcome it.." But the people chose fear instead of faith, trusting in themselves instead of in God. They agreed to select a leader and start on their way back to Egypt. That decision to do things their own way instead of God's way doomed them to perish in the wilderness. The only ones from that entire generation to enter the Promised Land were the faith-filled and obedient, Joshua and Caleb.

God wants to "do you good in the end" but in His wisdom He knows that He cannot entrust the rich abundance of the Promised Land to a person who is not utterly dependent upon Him, humble in heart and fastidiously obedient to His every Word. Much like the danger inherent when a wealthy father gives a young, immature son an abundant sum of money, the same potential danger of personal disaster exists if a Christian were to enter into the Promised land of prosperity, abundance and untold blessings without the humility of heart, complete trust in God and perfect obedience to His commands that God requires. But if you maintain a humble attitude, a true daily dependence and trust in God and are careful to be obedient, you will be able to handle God's blessing of prosperity. If you show yourself trustworthy in wilderness seasons of your life, you will be found trustworthy in the Promised Land. This can be accomplished only by His grace, and with His help.

In order to avoid perishing in any "wilderness" you may be experiencing right now, guard your heart this way:

- 1) Give thanks continuously for God's goodness and faithfulness instead of complaining about your circumstances ... this sin got the Israelites into big trouble with God! (See Num. 14: 29)
- 2) Trust God and Believe His Word that He intends to do you good in the end (you must resist the temptation to fear that God will not come through for you in the situations you are currently facing).

3) Be watchful to obey God in every area of your life. Don't prolong your time in the wilderness through disobedience even to the smallest command you have been given!

4) Begin to rejoice because you will see the goodness of the Lord in your life!

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