



RADICAL DISCIPLESHIP

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Ps. 28:1-2-*To you I call, O Lord my Rock; do not turn a deaf ear to me.*

THE WILDERNESS EXPERIENCE

Most Christians, especially those who have served the Lord faithfully for any length of time, have had a “wilderness experience”, a “period of dryness”, or a time of “aridity”. Regardless of the name we give it, it is not a joyful time. **It is a time when we feel all alone, deserted, dying of spiritual thirst in the middle of a spiritual draught.** How many desperate calls have reached Heaven, all sounding the same to the Lord: “Where are you, God?” “Why have you deserted me?” “What have I done wrong?” “Please come to me, Lord. I am dying.”

There is not much solace in a wilderness experience, but one comforting thought is that we are not the first, nor will we be the last to have such an encounter. All true saints have had the experience, some more than once. Why? What have we done to deserve this? Or what haven’t we done? Our first thought, usually, is that it is caused by sin. And maybe there is some unconfessed sin in our lives, and if the Holy Spirit brings it to your

attention, you must get it taken care of. But it is doubtful that it will end your period of dryness. **Sin is not why God sent you there.**

Ps. 28:1-2-*To you I call, O Lord my Rock; do not turn a deaf ear to me. For if you remain silent, I will be like those who have gone down to the pit. Hear my cry for mercy as I lift up my hands toward your Most Holy Place.*

Ps. 38: 9-10-*All my longings lie open before you, O Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you. My heart pounds, my strength fails me; even the light has gone from my eyes.*

It appears that they had wilderness experiences back in Old Testament times, too. And they hurt just as badly then as we do now.

There are many Psalms that seem to reach into your heart when you are experiencing spiritual dryness. **King David was no stranger to the wilderness experience. And yet he was “a man after God’s own heart”.**

What is it with these dry times? Why do they occur?

What value do they have? What are we to learn from them?

THE REASON FOR SPIRITUAL BLAHS

Spiritual dryness, or the wilderness experience, is God’s way of getting us to exercise our faith in an area where we get little opportunity for spiritual obedience. This is especially true in the above-ground Church where there is no persecution; our spiritual lives are generally good; and the motion and feeling, the gratitude for what God has done for us confirm and solidify the goodness of God in our lives. But what happens if God takes away the emotion and the feeling?

Let’s pause for just a moment and qualify the “wilderness experience”. If you are a half-hearted Christian and things aren’t going well, that’s not necessarily a wilderness experience. It is more likely the consequence of your half-heartedness. If you are playing around with the things of the world and suddenly things go awry in your life, again that is most

likely a consequence of your actions, not a wilderness experience.

We are speaking to those who truly love and truly serve the Lord and somehow, out of the blue, you suddenly lose all your emotion and your feeling for serving the Lord. **Your worship seems dry; your prayers seem to roll off your tongue and fall to the floor. You really don't even feel like praying or worshipping at all. Reading the bible does nothing for you.** You wonder if you wouldn't be better off just giving up and going on the Heaven.

Stop!!! This is not an actual fire. This is a test. And you, dear Christian friend, are not passing the test.

Let's look at the circumstances again. Your worship was emotional, full of feeling; you wanted to worship, you enjoyed it; you felt like you were drawing close to the Lord. That was then. Now, all of those things are gone. Your worship feels like nothing. You begin to wonder if you've lost your love for the Lord. Sometimes, you don't even want to worship. And you start to question God. Why are you being punished?

You are not being punished. You're being tested. Your faith is being strengthened by fire. What

is the difference between those two scenarios – before the wilderness and during the wilderness? When things were going good, you had emotion and feeling; when things were dry, there was no emotion and no feeling. That's all! **But dear friends, we are not to live on emotion and feeling. We are to live by faith.** You now have an opportunity to exercise your faith and worship the same way you did before and just forget about the emotion. Focus on the goodness of God. God knows your heart. He doesn't care about the emotion. It, generally, comes from the flesh anyway. **There is a world of difference between emotion and passion.** You can still worship with passion even when there is no emotion. God is still God. He is still worthy of your worship. Do it! When you have finished worshipping, you accept, by faith, the fact that God is as pleased with that worship as He is with your regular worship, maybe even more so. And, after all, what is the purpose of worship? Is it to please God or to please you?

Now, it's time for prayer. Guess what? It's the same scenario, isn't it? You can pray the same prayer for the same person and it just seems like its not reaching God. It has no oomph! No wings. No get up and go. You wonder why you even try. What does that mean? Why is it

happening? That might mean that our former prayers were heard (in our opinion) because we felt like they were heard. **We based on faith on our feelings.** Let us remember that the Scripture says that God hears our prayers. That's why we know they were heard, not because of what we felt. So, what do we do? During your wilderness experience, pray the same way you did before and pay no attention to your feelings; pay attention to what God's word says. Those prayers are heard, too. Why? Because the Bible says they are. It has nothing to do with your feelings.

1 John 5:14-15-*This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of him.*

We pray the same way, during the wilderness experience, as we did prior to it. The word of God doesn't change. If we pray according to God's will, He hears us. And if He hears us, we know that we have that for which we have asked. Regardless of how we feel or how high off the ground we think our prayers may have gotten. Or may not have gotten.

Of course, there are other things that occur during the wilderness experience, too. Maybe there are physical problems that won't seem to

go away; or there are other family concerns that press in on you. It is still the same problem. In normal situations, you go to the Lord and feel as if your prayers are being heard and answered. You may be going through a tough time but you don't feel as though God has deserted you.

But during the wilderness experience, you do feel as though God has deserted you. You feel like you have been deserted. You feel like your prayers have not been heard. Your worship is blah. In fact, your whole spiritual life seems to be blah.

Friend, you are not the first one to experience this feeling. Nor will you be the last. **The greatest king in history, King David, had enough wilderness experiences to write a book of Psalms.** Can't you commiserate with him? Yes, you can. Why? Because that is what you go through, too, isn't it? **But David ends every one of his Psalms with pure worship. He never forgets who his God is. And he never forgets from where his strength comes.**

VICTORY

Ps. 40:1-3-*I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to*

stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord.

Ps. 46:1-3-*God is our refuge and our strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea. Though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.*

The only way to get out of your wilderness experience is to pay no attention to the symptoms and believe the Lord and pray and worship as you always have. And persevere. **Wilderness experiences are all about persevering.** You must go all the way through the experience. Don't give up! Trust God. He is faithful.

Early in my Christian walk, I thought that the whole idea was to just get through the wilderness experience any way I could. Many times, I quit early. And when I did, guess what happened? The experience ended. And I thought: *Wow! It would have ended right away, anyway. I guess I learned a lot through that.* Wrong! The reason it ended was because I quit. I failed the test. God sighed and shook His head, realizing that we'd have to do it all over again sometime in the future.

Hang in there, Christian friend. **Ultimately, God wants us to go through**

those experiences in victory.

It can happen and it will happen if we allow God to be God and if we recognize what is happening and why. We must know that God is in complete control of our situation. He has his reasons.

Jesus told Simon Peter that he would be going through a wilderness experience, that Satan would sift him like wheat. But then He said, "But I have prayed for you that your faith will not fail."

Jesus knows what you're going through, too. And He wants your faith to not fail, also.

Soon, your wilderness experience will be over. Why? It is because you passed the test. You learned what God wanted you to learn. **You now have a greater understanding of who God is, how He works, what His word says and how you must rely on it, not your feelings and emotions.** That's a lot of learning packed into one experience.

Abraham went through them. So did Moses. How about Elijah? Jeremiah? Ezekiel? Or Daniel and his three friends. And, of course, King David was not just a great warrior, but he was also the king of wilderness experiences. And that's just the Old Testament.

Wilderness experiences are God's way of disciplining and pruning those He loves, building faith, breaking down our reliance on our feelings and our emotions, and crucifying the self or flesh. They are worthwhile experiences. And if we intend to be radical disciples, we must walk through the wilderness that God has allowed to come our way. Our wilderness experience had our name on it long before we were even born.

Ultimately, we need to grow up and react to wilderness experiences as mature Christians. When we find ourselves in those situations, we must turn to the Lord and determine to worship even more than usual, pray more than usual, and study the word more than usual. **Determine, in your heart, that you will not wilt under the hot sun of spiritual aridity, but rather you will trust in the Lord even more than usual because you know the dryness is temporary and that God has a reason for it.**

Allow Him to do His work in you. You will come out of it a better servant, with greater understanding and with fewer distractions. What is this all about? It's about God conforming us to the likeness of Jesus (Rom. 8:29).

God is good. He doesn't need our help, but He does want our worship. He doesn't want our whining, but He

does want our obedience. He turns His back on our pity parties but He reaches out for our faith. He is disappointed in our giving up, but He rejoices in our perseverance.

Everything that God does is good. And God does wilderness experiences.

Please join us at the Radical Discipleship meetings every other Monday at New Life Foursquare Church, 5913 Jefferson Pike, Frederick. We meet next on Monday, April 21st at 7:00 P.M.

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Peter Hess is the author of multiple non-fiction Christian books and Christian fiction novels that are sold nationwide. More information is available on the website.

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Be radical for God!

God bless you!!
