

Followers of the Way

“Don’t Waste The Wilderness Experience That God Intends To Use To Bring About His Blessings”

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Genesis 45:4-8; 50:15-20

1) If you are a believer and follower of Jesus Christ, what kind of wilderness experience have you faced so far in your journey through this life?

a) A wilderness experience might be defined as a particular time or a particular situation or a particular circumstance in your life during which God seems to be silent in the midst of your suffering and your trials or persecution or difficulties and when all doors seem to be shut and there is “no light at the end of the tunnel.”

i) Eg: Jesus says in John 16:33: *“In this world you will have trouble.”*

ii) Eg: David, whose life we read about in the Old Testament, loved the Lord and followed Him; but he experienced many troubles throughout the course of his life, and he faced his own wilderness experiences in his walk with the Lord.

aa) Eg: David cries out in Psalm 13:1-3: *“How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? Look on me and answer, O Lord my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death . . .”*

bb) Eg: David calls out again in Psalm 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 call to you for help, as I lift up my hands toward your Most Holy Place.”*

cc) Eg: And David pleads in Psalm 69:1-3: *“Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me. I am worn out calling for help; my throat is parched. My eyes fail, looking for my God.”*

b) If you have not yet faced a wilderness experience as a believer and follower of Jesus Christ, then it might be because you are a new believer in Christ and the Lord has put a “bubble of protection” around you as you’re beginning to grow in your newly-found faith in Jesus Christ.

c) But if we consider ourselves to be more mature believers in Christ and have never faced a wilderness experience, then it might be good for us to examine ourselves and our walk with the Lord in the light of such Scriptures as:

i) 2 Timothy 3:12: *“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted . . .”*

ii) 1 Peter 2:19-21: *“For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”*

- 2) As a believer and follower of Jesus Christ who has faced suffering and trials or persecution or difficulties and doors seem to be shut and there is “no light at the end of the tunnel,” and in the midst of it all, God seems to be silent, have you ended up wasting your wilderness experience?
 - a) To waste your wilderness experience is to grow bitter or resentful or to languish in self-pity and to allow your faith in God to grow cold in the midst of it all.
 - b) And to waste your wilderness experience is to end up missing what God intends to use to bring about His blessings.

- 3) Hopefully we can learn from the example of Joseph’s wilderness experience so that we don’t end up wasting our own wilderness experience by growing bitter or resentful or by allowing our faith in God to grow cold in the midst of it all.
 - a) Because of the jealousy of Joseph’s ten older brothers, they kidnapped him and sold him to some merchants who then took him to Egypt and subsequently sold him to one of Pharaoh’s officials, Potiphar, whose household Joseph then worked in as a slave.
 - b) After a while, Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce Joseph, and when he refused her advances, she falsely accused Joseph of sexual misconduct and Joseph was consequently thrown into prison.
 - c) Joseph’s wilderness experience involving his slavery and imprisonment lasted for thirteen long years. But over the course of these thirteen years, the Lord’s desire was to use Joseph’s wilderness experience for His intended purposes.
 - d) Because the Lord enabled Joseph to interpret Pharaoh’s dream about the need to preserve grain during the upcoming seven years of abundance in order to prepare for the subsequent seven years of famine, Joseph was propelled from languishing in prison to being in charge of Pharaoh’s palace and the whole land of Egypt and second-in-command to Pharaoh himself.
 - e) Then because of the eventual seven year famine in the world, all the surrounding countries came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph. And eventually Joseph’s brothers had to make a journey to Egypt where they had to come and bow down before Joseph, whom they did not recognise, and humbly ask him for grain for their starving families.
 - f) When Joseph’s brothers eventually found out that the man they had bowed down to was actually their brother Joseph, they were afraid for their lives. And they were particularly terrified of what Joseph might do to them after their Father, Jacob, died.
 - g) But they didn’t have to be afraid because Joseph chose not to waste his wilderness experience that God had intended to use to bring about His blessings.
 - h) Joseph’s response to his brothers was this: *“Don’t be afraid. . . . You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.”* Gen.50:19-21
 - i) Joseph would have wasted his wilderness experience if he had allowed his faith in God to grow cold and he had grown bitter and resentful and had sought to take revenge upon his brothers.
 - j) But Joseph didn’t do that. Instead, Joseph’s faith in God grew and as a result he came to realise that it was his wilderness experience that God was using to bring about His blessings—not only in his own life but in the lives of his own family as well as the whole nation of Egypt and the surrounding countries.

- 4) I well remember one of my wilderness experiences that occurred over 30 years ago during a time that God seemed to be silent and all doors seem to be shut and there was “no light at the end of the tunnel.”

- a) In desiring to try and better understand the Lord and what He was doing in and through my own sufferings, I was led to desire a deeper understanding of Christ's suffering on the Cross.
- b) I had grown up knowing all the Scriptures and hearing numerous messages about Christ's sacrifice on the Cross. But I begin to pray that I might have a deeper understanding of the Cross of Christ.
- c) But God didn't fulfil my desire by suddenly "zapping" a lot of knowledge about the Cross of Christ into my mind. No! How He gave me a deeper understanding of the Cross was by turning up the heat and allowing me to experience even greater suffering through more fiery trials and difficulties.
- d) But it was during this time that I picked up the Bible and begin to read and to study and to meditate upon it like I had never done before--from Genesis to Revelation. And as a consequence, I began to realise that the Lord was indeed answering my prayer and desire to have a deeper understanding of the Cross.
- e) Eg: Books of the Bible like Leviticus suddenly came alive—verses like Leviticus 17:11: *"For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life."*
- f) And I was blessed in a way that I had never anticipated! My preaching and teaching of God's Word had a new anointing that I had never before experienced.
- g) God had intended to use my wilderness experience to bring about His blessings.

5) Don't waste your wilderness experience by allowing your faith in God to grow cold and by growing bitter and resentful or languishing in self-pity because of your suffering and your trials or persecution or difficulties.

6) So what are some key things that we should do in the midst of our wilderness experience so that we don't miss what God intends to use to bring about His blessings? I'll quickly mention four things that I believe we should do:

- a) We need to continue to put our trust in the Lord even though He seems silent in the midst of our suffering and our trials or persecution or difficulties.
 - i) God is wanting to use the silence in order to cause our faith to grow deeper in Him.
 - ii) God's Word declares in 2 Corinthians 5:7 that *"We live by faith, not by sight."* We live by faith and not by our ability to see God's hand at work in and through the circumstances of our lives.
 - iii) And to continue to put our trust in God is to apply ourselves to "hearing" the written Word of God as found in the Bible as we read and study and meditate upon it.
 - iv) Romans 10:17 declares: *"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message [the Logos or written Word of God], and the message is heard through the word of Christ [the Rhema word, which is when the Holy Spirit takes the Logos Word and speaks faith into our hearts]."*
- b) We need to continue to seek the Lord and commit to spending time with Him.
 - i) 1 Chronicles 16:11 instructs us: *"Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always."*
 - ii) And Hebrews 10:22 implores us: *"... let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith..."*
 - iii) And James 4:8 promises us: *"Come near to God and he will come near to you."*
- c) We need to continue to entrust ourselves to Jesus Christ who is Lord of all.
 - i) Acts 10:36 reminds us: *"You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all."*
 - ii) And we must follow Jesus' own example as read in 1 Peter 2:23: *"When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."*

- iii) So in following our Lord's own example, we need to continue to entrust ourselves to Jesus Christ who is Lord of all.
- d) We need to continue to rejoice in the Lord in the midst of our sufferings.
 - i) James 1:2-4 entreats us: *"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."*
 - ii) And Romans 5:2-4 instructs us: *"... we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope."*

7) Paul Billheimer, in his book entitled "Don't Waste Your Sorrows" said: "Not understanding God's benevolent purpose when sorrow and suffering come . . . it is easy to fall into a spirit of resentment and self-pity which produce frustration and depression. When this occurs . . . [the person] has wasted [their] sorrow. What God permitted in order to wean [them] from self-love and self-worship, and therefore for [their] spiritual growth, has resulted in loss."

- 8) The Lord has given us the example of Joseph's wilderness experience so that we can learn from it.
- a) We must believe that, like Joseph, God will use our wilderness experience to not only bless us but to also bless other people as well.
 - b) And we must believe that, like Joseph, what others intend in doing us harm, God intends to use for good in accomplishing His purposes.