

This is the story of Christmas. God sent His one and only son, Jesus, as the Christ, Messiah, and savior to our broken world. God became flesh and dwelt 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.**’”

Last week we saw that God is With Us Through the Valley. We May **Enjoy** God on the Mountaintops, But We Get to **Know** Him Intimately in the Valleys. In the Valley, I commit to Seek God’s Strength, Set My Mind on Jesus, and Dig a Well. Enjoy God On the Mountaintop, Know Him in the Valley and today...

Experience God in the Wilderness

In scripture the wilderness is often a metaphor for: Trials—Hardship—Wandering. Can you relate? Hardships and disappointments tend to leave you wandering in the wilderness. You are just not sure what you should do next.

In the Wilderness you start to think things like, “Why can’t I be like those other people who have it all together? She’s is so close to God—His career is moving—Their kids are successful—They have a beautiful house and they still get to go on Vacations! “But I’m just stuck. I’m going nowhere. Paralyzed. I feel alone in the wilderness and afraid.

Wilderness Often Follows Mountaintop Experiences

Prior to launching His ministry, Jesus has a mountaintop experience.

Matthew 3:16-17 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.

17 And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

But what immediately followed? Jesus was sent into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil for 40 days.

Matthew 4:1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

The devil is going to offer Jesus everything that the Father has already promised Jesus, but the sin and temptation would be to obtain those things the devil’s way rather than God’s way. Sound familiar?

In our everyday lives, its always amazing how quickly we can go emotionally from mountain top experiences to the wilderness, from feast to famine. And in the wilderness, we tend to make bad decisions and not choose God’s way. Here is a principal we need to understand:

Our Deepest Need Becomes A Gift When It Drives Us To Depend On God

The prophet Elijah learned this principle. In **1 Kings 18**, Elijah experienced one of the greatest victories in his life. With faith and boldness, he challenged the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel! It was a literal, physical, and an emotional mountaintop experience.

But in **1 Kings 19**, a threat is made on his life and he is immediately thrown in the wilderness of discouragement and uncertainty.

- His boldness before God turned to blaming God for his trouble, from Faith to fear.
- Power was drained by pity. Obedience was replaced by disobedience.

How quickly things changed! Sound familiar? Discouragement does the same thing to us.

- You get your dream job, then a new narcissistic boss transfers in and now you dread going to work.
- You are making up ground financially and even getting ahead and then the transmission goes out on your car, you roof leaks, or your dryer goes out.
- You are thinking you are up for “The Family of The Year” award and you child drops out of school, runs away, or gets arrested.

King Ahab told Jezebel what Elijah had done at Mt Carmel including killing prophets of Baal. Jezebel sent word to Elijah saying, “By this time tomorrow—I will kill you.” That’s all it took. So, what did this man of faith and power do?

1 Kings 19:3-4 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.”

We can handle a lot, then one thing pushes us over the edge. Consider Elijah:

- Elijah stood up to the evil King Ahab and prophesied a drought as the consequence of sin.
- For 3 years, King Ahab pursued Elijah, but God protected him.
- While in hiding, God supernaturally fed Elijah by ravens.
- Later God would use Elijah to raise a widow’s son from the dead.
- On Mt. Carmel Elijah stands down 450 false prophets and calls fire down from Heaven to consume his water drenched altar and sacrifice to the Lord.
- Elijah destroys the false prophets, asked God for rain and it rained, and he outran Ahab’s chariots coming down the mountain.

Elijah experienced God’s protection and provision! But an angry woman makes a threat and he falls apart!

Sometimes the Most Spiritual Thing You Could Do is Rest

1 Kings 19:5a Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

Elijah is not only tired, but he is also exhausted and he is depleted. Maybe you can relate.

It’s interesting that in the wilderness Elijah gets some needed physical rest and spiritual replenishment.

Psalms 23:2-3 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, 3 he refreshes my soul.

When an angel comes to him, he doesn’t preach a sermon! He doesn’t rebuke Elijah saying, “Where’s your faith!” The message God has the angel tell Elijah is, “*Eat and get some rest.*”

1 Kings 19:5-6 Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.” 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.

Elijah is about to learn that God is With Us In The Wilderness.

Psalms 46:10-11 He says, “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” 11 The LORD Almighty is with us the God of Jacob is our fortress.

The God of Second Chances

1 Kings 19:7-10 The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, “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. 9a There he went into a cave and spent the night.

We serve a God of Second Chances. Maybe you didn’t get it right last time, maybe you retreated to the wilderness to hide, but the Lord is coming to you again and preparing you for your future journey.

1 Kings 19: 9b And the word of the LORD came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

What are you doing here? What good is this going to do? Is staying up half the night worrying helping at all? Why are you paralyzed by fear instead of doing what I called you do?

1 Kings 19:10 He replied, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.” (Not True, by the way.)

God Meets Elijah in His Need

Our deepest need becomes a gift when it drives you to depend on God.

1 Kings 19:11-12

- 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.

God wasn't in the remarkable! God was in the ordinary. God was in the whisper.

- *When we are overwhelmed by stress, overcome by anxiety, and wandering in a wilderness, 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 A Whisper?

One of the things I used to do with my children, and I do with my grandchildren is I tell them I have a secret to tell them and in order to tell them I must whisper it in their ear. Normally the secret will be something like, “You are special” or “I love you” or “Jesus loves you very much”. Of course, they aren't really secrets and I could just tell them in my regular voice, which I often do, but as you know, I have an ulterior motive. I whisper in their ear just to be close to them. It is a special little moment of intimacy between parents and children as we whisper secrets in their ears, and they whisper them back in our ears.

When someone speaks to you in a whisper, you've got to get really close to them, with their mouth right next to your ear. You have to lean into a whisper. Maybe that's why God chose to speak to Elijah in a whisper. Maybe God wanted Elijah, and He wants you and I, to lean in and get close to Him.

- God doesn't want us to hear His voice just for the sake of hearing His voice, God wants to have an intimate relationship with us.
- God wants us to experience Him even in the wilderness.

Therefore, more often than not, He speaks to us in a whisper.

The Devil Shouts Lies, God Whispers the Truth

Jesus doesn't get our attention by shouting louder, he calls us closer to him so we can hear Him. Your greatest needs may have you in a wilderness today, but God is With Us In the Wilderness. Jesus is there with you, he never leaves or forsakes you, and maybe the wilderness is the place of quietness where you can hear his whisper calling out to you today.

Next Step to Make A Difference: I will take advantage of the wilderness as an opportunity to hear the whisper of God, by drawing close to Him and leaning in.

God With Us In The Wilderness

- Elijah Learned That God is Close to the Broken Hearted and Downcast.

Psalms 34:18 The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

- Elijah Learned That God is Close on the Mountain and in the Wilderness

Psalm 139:7-10 NL 7 I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence!

8 If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave,[a] you are there.

9 If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans,

10 even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me

- Elijah Learned That in the Wilderness It's Easier to Hear the Whispers of God.

1 Kings 19:12 And after the fire came a gentle Whisper.

Next Step to Make A Difference: In the wilderness I will look for Jesus and experience His closeness.

I'd rather be in the wilderness with God than on the mountain without Him.

Your deepest need becomes a gift—drives you to depend on God.