Wilderness: Off the Grid

Week One: Tested in the Wilderness

**Big Idea:** Jesus is fresh off a forty-day fast when the devil tests him by tempting him to satisfy his cravings, to show off his power and to be recognized as ruler. Each time Satan tempts Jesus to give into these worldly desires, Jesus silences him by quoting scripture, deciding to allow God to satisfy him, and to worship God alone. When we are tempted in the wilderness times of life we can also stand firm in the faith and the truth of scripture.

**Think:** In our lives we may go through seasons of wilderness that may be a testing ground for us to grow in faith.

**Feel:** Though testing and hard seasons may be uncomfortable, they can also be a place where we rely on what we know to be true, and grow from them.

**Do:** Stand firm in the truth that you know, and look at testing as a way to grow in your faith.

**Scripture:** Matthew 4:1-11

### Introduction

Today we begin a new 4-week series called *Wilderness: Growing Off the Grid.* You may be surprised to learn that the Bible speaks both fondly and extensively about the off-grid-wilderness experience of people like Jesus, the Israelites, Hosea, and many others. You can find evidence of the wilderness in the Old Testament, the Prophets, and the New Testament. And it was so important in the lives of the Israelites that the Lord kept them there for 40 years.

So what is it about getting away, getting alone, and being challenged that is so transformative for us? What’s so special about growing off the grid? What can we learn from the great cloud of witnesses who’ve gone before us?

To begin our journey, we are going to start with one of the most well-known wilderness experiences found in Matthew chapter 4. But before we get there I want to share a short illustration with you;

“A. Parnell Bailey visited an orange grove where an irrigation pump had broken down. The season was unusually dry and some of the trees were beginning to die for lack of water. The man giving the tour then took Bailey to his own orchard where irrigation was used sparingly.

“These trees could go without rain for another 2 weeks,” he said. “You see, when they were young, I frequently kept water from them. This hardship caused them to send their roots deeper into the soil in search of moisture. Now mine are the deepest-rooted trees in the area. While others are being scorched by the sun, these are finding moisture at a greater depth.” (Our Daily Bread)

The desert-wilderness experiences of life forces our roots to go deeper. Hardship and adversity force us to press into faith, into Christ, and into prayer. Like the Israelites wandering in the desert, like Joseph locked up in a jail cell, like Jonah in the belly of the whale - there are times in life where we must come face to face with our reality and stand squarely on our faith in God to come through and provide. These are sacred and transformative times for those who call themselves disciples of Christ. Necessary seasons in the journey of sanctification as we look to the author and perfecter of our faith; who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross. (Hebrews 12:2)

Let’s get started.

### Main Teaching

**Let The Lord Lead You**

As I mentioned earlier, the Bible actually has a lot of stories about people finding themselves in the wilderness and learning in those environments. Sometimes it’s an actual physical wilderness and other times it’s a difficult time or season they find themselves in. Either option becomes a place of great teaching for the people in the midst of hardship.

Some lessons we learn from being taught, reading, or seeing it happen in other people’s lives. There is however, something unique and special that happens when we actually experience a hard time and it turns into a lesson etched in our hearts and minds that we will never forget.

So this morning we are going to be reading from Matthew chapter 4 (*have them turn to this chapter*) a well known story about Jesus being tempted or tested, as some translations say, in the wilderness. And as we walk through Jesus’ experience I hope we would come to understand the great role that the wilderness can play in our own lives.

*“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, He was hungry.” Matthew 4:1-2*

Now we already have to pause here for a minute because we immediately see some details that we might not remember from when we originally heard this story in Sunday School class. The first is, Jesus was *led* to the wilderness, and was led by none other than *the Spirit.*

This is fascinating to me because I always remember this story going, “*Jesus was in the wilderness, he was fasting, he was hungry and so the enemy came to prey on him to try and get him to sin, taking advantage of his weakened state.*” And though some of that does happen, the main reason for his being in the wilderness was guided by the Spirit. There was a specific reason Jesus found himself in that wilderness, at that time, for that purpose.

He was there… verse one says, “*to be tempted by the devil.*” That was the reason. The condition of his body, the fact he was fasting, everything else comes secondary to the fact that he was brought there by the spirit *in order* for the devil to tempt him.

We know from scripture that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature (*Luke 2:52*). So as he lived on this earth, there were experiences and situations he found himself in that helped him grow, and this was one of those times. There was something about to take place in the wilderness, both geographically and metaphorically, that would contribute to him becoming the man he was.

There was purpose in the wilderness. There was something greater to gain through the trial and temptation Jesus endured. He had to trust where the Spirit was leading Him.

(Pastor - do you have a personal story you can share about a time of testing and trial where you had to trust the Lord’s leading?)

And we must do the same today. We must trust where the Lord leads and by faith where He is taking us.

**Your First Response**

If you google any variation of phrases containing the words *hardship*, *character*, *true* *nature* *revealed,* etc. you will find a long list of quotes, essentially all saying the same thing. Which is that hardships and difficult times reveal what people are truly made of. There is something about adversity that lowers our walls and shows what is truly going on inside of us.

Maintaining the appearance that all is well is typically the first thing to go when times get tough. And in those moments, we start to see the response that people have to adversity and it is a window into what has been there all along.

And so it should be no surprise to us, that when Jesus is then tempted 3 times, his response is to go to scripture to find solace, strength, and boldness to fight the lies of the enemy. Jesus turns to his true nature, and stands firm on the truth of the word.

**Read v. 3-10**

These verses, as we’ve already said, are pretty familiar to us. We know this story, but we should never lose sight of two simple things:

* Jesus, the incarnate son of God, was tempted just as we are and;
* In the face of those temptations He models exactly what our response should be: run to scripture!

Jesus demonstrates how to use scripture in times of need. There is no greater encouragement or tool or weapon than the living word of God. Of course this means we must know it. Psalm 119:11 says “*I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you*.” God’s word helps us fight sin and temptation.

In crisis moments, we tend to react. As adrenaline kicks in, we even lose fine motor skills and it becomes hard to accomplish simple tasks. It is for this reason that military and law enforcement officers spend so much time in training and developing step by step processes. They then spend even more time repeating, over and over again, these simple steps and processes in order to take the guesswork out and make the skills they are teaching, feel second nature.

They work hard to train their reactions.

We have to view turning to scripture in the same way. We must learn scripture, memorize it, put it up around our house, work place, on our phones, and allow it to permeate our minds.

We must develop the habit of immediately turning from temptation. This won’t become a habit by doing it once, or twice, but by repeating the process over and over again. If we continue, it will eventually become second nature for us. We will know that in times of temptation, we will turn to God’s word. When we face a wilderness experience, we turn to scripture. When we are overwhelmed with life, you got it! We turn to scripture.

We must ask ourselves, what verses do we know? What chapters speak to our soul? What sermons will bring us encouragement in the midst of a difficult season?

Reading the word of God is the key here. Satan even tries, in v. 6 to misquote some verses from Psalm 91. And even in this instance, Jesus corrects his use of those verses. He is able to do so because he *knows* the scriptures and has hidden them in his heart and made them his first response, not his last resort.

**God Will Give You What You Need**

At the end of this back and forth with the evil one, Jesus is triumphant. Verse 11 says, “*the devil left him, and the angels came and attended him.*” No one knows what exactly the angels did in order to attend to him. This is, however, a principle we see repeated throughout scripture, God looking out for and taking care of his people.

There are numerous references in the Psalms, perhaps my favorite is the well known Psalm 121:3 “*He will not let your foot slip— he who watches over you will not slumber;”*  which of course should give great comfort to us no matter what we are facing… The creator of the entire cosmos never takes a break in watching over His creation.

I think of another instance of Jesus, when he was in the garden praying and mentally preparing for his own death. He cries out to the Father, asking if there is any other way to accomplish what is to come. And in His moment of distress, sweating out blood, it says, “*An angel from heaven appeared to strengthen him.*” (Luke 22:43)

If you’ve read this passage before, you may have missed this verse because it’s hidden and tucked away in the middle of a very intense narrative. And yet, this is such an important aspect of the story… that in His moment of complete and utter anguish an angel appeared to strengthen Jesus.

God watches over and attends us just as He did His own son. He will not let your foot slip. He does not take breaks nor does He step away from His commitment. He never leaves, never forsakes, never turns His back on His children.

And to take it a step even further, Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that;

*“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”*

There is no temptation you will face in life that is uniquely positioned to destroy you. It may feel that way at times, but the truth is this: God will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear. And through the strengthening of the Spirit we can, like Christ, stand in the face of adversity, suffering, and temptation.

We can overcome because He has overcome.

### Conclusion

I know many of you here today are facing hardships. Maybe you are suffering, and you are asking questions like, “How much longer can I do this?” I know this is difficult, but...

The wilderness is a dangerous place.

And the wilderness is a sacred space.

It’s a uniquely equipped place where God brings His people, meets His people, and grows His people in their faith.

Yes you can expect it to be hard. You can expect it to be painful at times and seemingly unbearable at others. But, you can also expect God to be there with you. Just like He was with Israel, just like He was with Jesus, just like He was with John on the island of Patmos… He is with you too. The testing of your faith proves out the power of your faith.

Press into the Bible. Combat the lies you’re hearing with the truth of scripture.

Stand in faith.

Believe.

Let’s pray together.