

Lessons from The Wilderness

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This year our pastor, Jordan Oloomi, has been leading us through a sermon series called “The Wild, Wild Wilderness.” We are spending 40 Sundays in the book of Numbers with the Israelites, who spent 40 years in the wilderness. We are not finished yet – but the messages have been good for me in my own “wilderness” moments this year: in March, my sister passed away following surgery for ovarian cancer, and all throughout the year I’ve had to face big questions related to my future. While some things are getting clearer, there are still unknowns in 2025. I am a person who likes routine and tries to avoid uncertainty. I would never choose the wilderness.



The book we call “Numbers” (because of the census recorded there) has a different title in Hebrew, where its name means “in the wilderness.” This book recounts the story of the nation of Israel after God freed them from slavery in Egypt. Because of their sin, pride, and lack of trust in God, He kept them stuck in the wilderness for 40 years until they learned their lessons and were ready to enter the good land He had promised to give them.

In the same way, we all have wilderness periods in our life when we feel lost or frustrated and wonder what God is up to. Here are a few applications from the book of Numbers from Pastor Jordan:

- The wilderness is often a time of waiting, of lacking clear direction. Don’t waste the waiting time. What you do in the wilderness will prepare you for God’s promises, for what is next. In seasons of waiting, God is still at work and He seeks our cooperation.
- The wilderness can choke us or make us stronger. Seeking God and dwelling on the truth makes a difference. Jeremiah 29:11 says, “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” (NIV) Romans 8:28 says, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” God can bring good out of difficulty and pain. Even if we break, God will be able to put us back together.
- We can be worshippers of Him in every season of life: in good times, in bad, as a single person, in obscurity, without a plan for the future, etc.

- We may have multiple wilderness times, and God does a different work in us each time. The Israelites went through three deserts: Sinai, Paran and Moab. In Sinai they faced temptation (to worship the golden calf); in Paran, God dealt with their pride and constant complaining (“we don’t want this food”). In Moab, they struggled with doubt, asking, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt?" whenever anything went wrong. We may go through a series of wilderness times so that God can work on us in various ways.
- It has always been God’s intention to dwell with us. In the Garden of Eden God walked intimately with Adam. God met the Israelites in the tabernacle and later, the temple. Then Jesus came as ‘Immanuel – God with us.’ We now have the Holy Spirit; we are the temples for His presence. In every circumstance, God offers us a place of intimacy with Himself. He wants to meet us and dwell in our lives.
- Sometimes God cares more about our development than our destination. The process of becoming Christlike is what the wilderness is all about. Be open to the Lord and what He wants to do in your life wherever you are, even if you are limping. Pride keeps us from changing, yet God wants to break and remold us. It can be painful.
- God is always working on us. Our tendency is to stay stagnant, but God’s always pruning us to stimulate new growth and to make us like Him. What a horrible thing to go through a season of life and not hear what God is saying, to miss Him. Sometimes God wants to work on things we don’t think are important. For the Israelites it was not “getting to the Promised Land” but “learning to trust and obey the Lord.” His priorities for us may not be so much about “getting a job” but about “gratitude”; not “finding a mate” but “forgiveness.” What is God working on in your life?
- The wilderness is hard. Following Jesus is a crucifixion of self: we will die, we carry our own cross. It is not a friendly path. Even Jesus had a wilderness season and a cross. If you follow Jesus, you will have trouble. People might hate you. It might be uncomfortable, but in the safe, comfortable places we don’t get to witness the supernatural God. We can choose safety and security, or we can take the risk of adventure with God.

If you’re in a dry season, take heart. God hasn’t forgotten you. Here are three things you can focus on in the wilderness:

1. Humble your heart before God (a posture of acceptance).
2. Ask God to show you what He wants to do in your life in this season.
3. Listen and be ready to obey.

“We are God’s workmanship.” Don’t give up. He is working even in the wilderness.