

Wilderness Wisdom
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 Audio Transcripts of Sunday Sermons

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Wilderness Wisdom (4 sermons)

The Bible tells us, that of the people of Israel, the majority of them, God was not really pleased with. He loved them. He saved them. He got the Holy Ghost on them. He did miracles for them. But He was not well pleased with them, it says in 1 Corinthians 10.

It takes faith to please God. Why was God not so pleased with them? Because they were overthrown in the wilderness. When a period, which God designed for their benefit, came into their life, instead of responding in a godly way and understanding what God wanted to do, they fought, wrestled, and eventually fell and failed in that wilderness experience.

Jesus had a wilderness experience, it must be important. It can't be just an Old Testament thing. 1 Corinthians 10 says: it's a warning, a learning exercise, it's something for us to learn from, and it says: make sure you don't make the same mess ups that they made.

[Wilderness Wisdom \(1 of 4\)](#) Jesus, after He'd experienced the Holy Ghost and had this great encounter, was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. If we want to become great in anything, there's always a season of preparation. Most of us want to just get the dream and we're there now, but it never works that way. Nothing in life works that way. There's always preparation. No one is born a great concert pianist, they had preparation. Everyone has preparation, and preparation's not nice.

[Wilderness Wisdom \(2 of 4\)](#) It helps if we just understand that the wilderness was God's idea, that that difficult season was His idea. All major men in the Bible had times or seasons which you would call a wilderness. A wilderness was a very dry place, full of wild animals, it was very difficult. It represented a very difficult season, a difficult time.

[Wilderness Wisdom \(3 of 4\)](#) If you're walking with God, you will find yourself quite frequently in transitions, changes. It's part of walking with God, because He's continually moving us on. You don't just get saved, and that's the end of it. He journeys you, because He has an assignment for your life, and He wants to develop you, or mature you, or prepare you for that assignment. The Bible speaks of transitions all the way through, and transitions are very uncertain times. They have their challenges, and have their difficulties, but God loves us to embrace the process of the transition and learn what we can, because it's your chance to prepare yourself for the next season. Many believers totally frustrate God's destiny for their life, because when God was trying to change them, they wouldn't transition.

[Fighting the Good Fight \(4 of 4\)](#) Every believer, whether you like it or not, is engaged in a spiritual conflict. The earth is a spiritual battle zone, and you're either in the fight winning, or you're in the fight and beaten up. The Bible calls it a fight of faith - its a fight about what you believe.

The only thing that can move the hand of God is that we are in faith, that we are agreeing with God about what God says. We take His side in life, and we begin to learn how to live and move by faith.

Just because you have a need, does not mean God will meet it. He knows the need. He looks for faith, and faith can be developed and cultivated. Faith has an evidence in our life, so when you're operating and living by faith, it is evident.

Audio

[Audio: Wilderness Wisdom \(1 of 4\).mp3](#)
[Audio: Wilderness Wisdom \(2 of 4\).mp3](#)
[Audio: Wilderness Wisdom \(3 of 4\).mp3](#)
[Audio: Fighting the Good Fight \(4 of 4\).mp3](#)

Notes

[Notes: Wilderness Wisdom \(1 of 4\)](#)
[Notes: Wilderness Wisdom \(2 of 4\)](#)
[Notes: Wilderness Wisdom \(3 of 4\)](#)
[Notes: Fighting the Good Fight \(4 of 4\)](#)

Wilderness Wisdom (1 of 4)

Sun 18 Apr 2010 AM « [Back to Top](#)

[Audio](#)» [Notes](#)» [Paperback](#)» [Share](#)» [Support](#)» [Review](#)»

Jesus, after He'd experienced the Holy Ghost and had this great encounter, was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. If we want to become great in anything, there's always a season of preparation. Most of us want to just get the dream and we're there now, but it never works that way. Nothing in life works that way. There's always preparation. No one is born a great concert pianist, they had preparation. Everyone has preparation, and preparation's not nice.

I wonder if you could open your Bible in Luke Chapter 3, and I have something on my heart to just share, and I believe it'll be a help, called a Wilderness Wisdom, or Wisdom from the Wilderness. How many people ever flunked a test? [Laughter] It's a shocker isn't it when you flunk a test? I remember my first year at university, my first maths test. I got four. [Laughter] I couldn't believe it - four. It wasn't quite so bad because I got four out of 50 which meant I did a quick sum, and turned that into eight out of 100, so in a moment I had eight per cent! I'm thinking dear Lord, I've come here to try and graduate, and I've four marks out of 50. It was dreadful, but that wasn't the end. I graduated and majored in maths, [laughter] so a flunk [applause] doesn't mean the end, and particularly flunking a test in God doesn't mean the end.

I like that about God, the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, though he fall, though he fall, he shall never be utterly cast down by God, because the Lord will lift him up, and get him up again! That's what the word of God says - just got to believe it. Don't lie down there. No, don't lie down and stay down. I want us just to read a few verses. I'm going to read two. You know with a sandwich, you know you've got the bread of the sandwich, and there's a bit of meat in the sandwich? We're just going to look at the bits of bread first of all, because we like the carbohydrate. [Laughs] So we look in Luke, Chapter 3, Verse 21. When all the people were baptised, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptised. He submitted to the move of God that was in His generation, in preparation to bringing in a fresh move - and then it says: while He prayed, heaven was opened. Oh, that's good - and the Holy Ghost came on Him in a bodily form like a dove, a voice came from heaven which said: You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased. What a wonderful encounter and experience; an open heaven, anointing of the Holy Ghost, God speaking verbally from heaven in a way that could be heard by everyone. That has got to be a great experience.

Okay, here's another good one. In Luke, Chapter 4 Verse 14: Then Jesus returned in the power of the Holy Ghost to Galilee, and news of Him went out everywhere, mainly because of all the miracles He did. Now don't you just love that? He had this fantastic encounter with Almighty God, the spirit of God on Him. What a great meeting that was! The presence of God came on Him, then we see Him with the power of the Holy Ghost. Now most Christians like those two verses. They like that part, but there's a little bit in the middle which is actually quite significant and important, and it goes like this in Chapter 4 Verse 1: Then Jesus, after He'd experienced the Holy Ghost and had this great encounter, and He returned from Jordan, He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. Well many people know about the acts of God, so we like meetings where there's miracles and great things happen, feel inspired and stirred; not so many people learn the ways of God.

Unless you learn the ways of God, you will become frustrated in your Christian life, because you'll be always reaching out for something that others seem to have, but it always seems beyond you. You're reaching to get something that seems available and seems promised, but it doesn't seem to come to you. It seems to come to others and there's this little thing in here which is really the meat in the sandwich, because between Jesus' experience of being filled with the Holy Ghost, and actually having manifestation of power, there was this period called a wilderness experience. I want to talk about that, because some of us are going through that wilderness experience now. It's important you understand what its purpose is, otherwise you'll get overwhelmed in it, discouraged. The Bible tells us, that of the people of Israel, the majority of them God was not really pleased with. Did He love them? He loved them. Did He save them? He saved them. Did He get the Holy Ghost on them? He got the Holy Ghost on them. Did He do miracles for them? He did miracles for them.

But He was not well pleased with them, it says in 1 Corinthians 10. It takes faith to please God. Why was God not so pleased with them? Because they were overthrown in the wilderness. When a period, which God designed for their benefit, came into their life, instead of responding in a godly way and understanding what God wanted to do, they fought, wrestled, and eventually fell and failed in that wilderness experience. Jesus had a wilderness experience, it must be important. It can't be just an Old Testament thing. 1 Corinthians 10 says: it's a warning, a learning exercise, it's something for us to learn from, and it says: make sure you don't make the same mess ups that they made. Two

billion people died so you could learn an expensive lesson, so it's quite good to read and learn the lesson isn't it aye? So the thing is that tests always come in the kingdom. Now when I went to university I had a test, but you always knew it was coming up, and you could prepare for your test. You swotted up, and then you went into a room, and then it was basically you'd learned. They did the test, they posted the marks the next day - so you knew about when it was coming, and what it was about, and you knew how to get ready.

But the tests with God don't work like that. [Laughter] What a shame. When God brings tests around our life, He doesn't advertise they're coming. They come when you don't expect them. You're probably in the middle of one right now - and when they come, they are not about head knowledge. They're not about how many books you've read, they're not about how many sermons you've listened to, they're not about how many iPod downloads you've got. They're not anything about how much knowledge you may have, and that is a dilemma, because for many of us we have a lot of knowledge. We've sat and listened to lots of wonderful preaching, but it's actually about what experience you have. It's about what is built into your life, in your walk with God. It is about the kind of person you really are on the inside, and in the initial phase of our Christian experience, often everything goes absolutely wonderfully. It's like we've - man, we've got cake, and we've got icing as well. It's just wonderful, we're having a glorious time.

Then next thing you know, you're eating bread with no butter or nothing, and it seems like it's a different deal. Now what happened? Where did God go? We don't understand that God actually designs a path for us. You know the Bible tells us that there is a scroll written with your destiny on it, and how your life will unfold, what God has prepared for you, but you have to open the scroll a little at a time. You've actually got to unwind it. It's not like a book, you'd read the end of the book like that. With a scroll you've got to take it, and unwind it bit by bit. God prescribes for us, He knows exactly what we need. So the purpose of the wilderness training, or wilderness seasons in our life, is essentially it's for preparation. It is preparation. If you are facing a season that you might call a wilderness season, I can assure you, it is your time of preparation. It is a time God has set aside for you, to be prepared for the things He's planned for your life, so it's important that you respond to God properly in the season of preparation.

If we want to become great in anything, there's always a season of preparation. Most of us want to just get the dream and we're there now, but it never works that way. Nothing in life works that way. There's always preparation. No one is a great concert pianist, they had preparation. Everyone has preparation, and preparation's not nice. I was with some men on a ship, musicians. I asked them how long do you practice? They said eight hours a day. I couldn't imagine sitting at a piano practising eight hours a day, that's what they did - so people in the Bible, all through the Bible you'll find any great man of God, not only had encounters with God, which we all love by the way, but they had wilderness experiences. We don't want to hear about those, but they are the way of God, to get you from your encounter experience, and your revelation, into your destiny, so you have to go through preparation.

Moses had 40 years in the back side of a desert, Israel did 40 years in the wilderness, David had a season in the wilderness, Goliath faced the nation for 40 days and 40 nights. Elijah, why does Elijah suddenly turn out, and turn the nation upside down? Where was he before that? In a wilderness, in an experience that was preparing him. John the Baptist, where was John the Baptist found? He wasn't found in a church. He was found in a wilderness, and the Bible says: the word of the Lord came to him in the wilderness. Everyone else had titles and positions; he got God's word speak into him - a big difference. You can have whatever position you like, whatever title you like. It matters not in the kingdom of heaven really. What counts is, whether you're hearing from God, and flowing with what God wants you to do. So anyway, God has a system of testing. It's helpful to know what that system is. It's called the wilderness.

Now have a look at it in Deuteronomy Chapter 8, and I'll give you just a few simple lessons out of it. It's always, always a place of preparation, and always God has something in mind for you, so let's have a read in here. We're going to look at it here, Israel, then we'll look at it quickly with Jesus, then I want to show you how to certainly flunk the wilderness, keys to flunking. I've learnt the keys because I've done many of them you know, at one point or another - but then God doesn't leave you down there. He lifts you up, and then you can learn how to succeed, so I'll give you some keys to succeed too. Here it is in Deuteronomy, Chapter 8. And you shall remember - Verse 2 - the Lord your God led you this way, these 40 years in the wilderness. Notice that word 'led' you. God led you in the wilderness - to humble you, prove you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, fed you with manna - allowed you to hunger! What kind of God is that? Oh my - fed you with manna that you didn't know, or your fathers didn't know, that He might make you know, that man shall not live by bread alone; but man shall live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Verse 16: He fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers didn't know or hadn't experienced, that He might humble you and test you - now notice this - to do you good in the end. God's got a plan for good. So let me give you just a few simple things about the wilderness that may help. You notice the first thing is, God led them there. The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, so God leads people into a wilderness. There are experiences you have in

life; it's not the devil, and it's not because you've stuffed up or messed up in a big way. It's God's leading you into a difficult season, that's all. Oh why would God want to do a terrible thing like that? I just want it all to be sugar and nice and spice. Don't talk to me about crosses and things like that - I want blessing! I want anointing! Oh come on, get a life, get real. See, the anointing comes after the cross. Cross gets you to heaven. Cross is a way of life. Cross is always a part of this deal, so the first thing to realise is, God leads you into the wilderness. It's God's idea.

It's God's idea to get you into a wilderness time, so - a wilderness time. A wilderness experience is for preparation, not destination. A wilderness experience is preparation, not destination, so whatever experience you may be going through now, that you might like to call a wilderness, believe me it is preparation, not destination. It's a place God wants you to move through, not stay there. Don't stay there, and definitely, don't die there. [Laughter] Definitely don't die there! It's just a preparation for the destination God has for your life, and God has to prepare us. See, it's like children growing. You'd love to give them lots of things, they have to be prepared. So the wilderness is a place of humbling. The wilderness is a place of humbling. The Bible tells us to humble ourselves, but not many of us want to do that really, and so God allows us a few experiences that bring a great humbling in our life. You may have been led into such an experience. You didn't want to go there, you just were following Jesus, and next thing you find, there you are, you're in a wilderness, and it's incredibly humbling.

So what kinds of things - notice the thing about the humbling is, you suffer lack? Now He calls you to suffer lack. He didn't leave them hungry, He still fed them. He said He tested them, said allow them to suffer lack, allowed you to get hungry. Hunger is a good thing, if you hunger for the right things. So He allowed you get hungry, so what kind of experiences - now this is what they include. This is probably not an exhaustive list, but this is a list of some things that you could call a wilderness experience. You might like to tick one or two of them: Pressure, tremendous pressure coming on your life. It could be financial pressure, family pressure, pressure of ill health, pressure of all kinds of things. It could be lack of some kind, you don't have enough. Lack of ability, lack of skill, could be a lack in some kind of area - you're running a ministry and you've got a lack of people. You've got a lack of resources.

Injustice is another wilderness experience, nothing after you've been through what is perceived was an injustice. Of course we just look at it through our eyes, so we say that's NOT FAIR! [Laughter] God says: I'm just trying to prepare you! It's not fair - meaning I don't deserve this. Of course you don't, but God's preparing you. You have to learn how to handle injustice. How would you be able to understand the cross, which is full of injustice, so an unjust experience can bring you to the cross, where Jesus suffered great injustice, and you can understand how to deal with injustice. Most people just become angry when there's injustice, and they're not going to have an answer when they're angry. You have to have compassion, and so God has to take us through some experiences. When you've been through injustice, you can understand people who have suffered injustice, and instead of saying: oh just get over it, you have compassion, because you've worked through it yourself.

Misunderstanding is another wilderness experience. Moses thought they would understand the call of God on his life; I am called to deliver a nation don't you know! No they didn't know, and they didn't care, and they chased him out of town and put a reward on his head. He ended up in the wilderness. What went wrong? I was so sure it was God, for me to deliver the nation. How come I'm here looking after sheep? Misunderstanding. Most of us want to be understood by people. When you feel misunderstood, now don't you get upset - welcome to your wilderness. You don't need to have people understand you. In fact when you walk with God, people won't always understand you, and you've got to live with that. How will you live with that? Well you have to experience it, and learn how instead of that natural desire of wanting to be understood - but you need to understand! I've got to explain! I've got to - no, you just need to lean on God, and let God sort it out. It's not an easy test, the one of misunderstanding.

Another one is opposition, where you have tremendous opposition, it doesn't seem fair. Another one is apparent failure, everything you've done seems to have fallen apart, and there it is, you look a mess. It happens. Probably the best way to describe a wilderness - if I want to use a word picture to describe a wilderness experience, it's a fruit tree in winter, bare sticks, doesn't look good. I like them in autumn, when they've got the beautiful leaves and fruit everywhere, it's wonderful. But there are times in our life when we look like we're a tree, there's no fruit, not even any leaves. All you can see are the bare sticks, and we live in an area like that. But one thing I've noticed about that, it's always followed by spring with the budding - and I notice it's followed by fruit bearing again as well, so it looks a bit like that, so that's the wilderness for you. Temptation is a wilderness experience.

What is there about a wilderness? Wilderness is a place where you feel alone. It's not you are alone, because God doesn't leave you, you just feel alone. You feel all on your own - all on my own! God, where are you? Of Hezekiah it said: God left him alone to test him, and see what was in his heart. God didn't leave him. It's just God withdrew the manifest presence, and it didn't feel like God was there. God was there, it just didn't feel like God was there, and in that didn't feel like God was there, then he had to make decisions what to do, because when you feel God, well it's

great when you feel God. I mean you're in church, you feel God woah! Then you get out in the car park and someone upsets you, and suddenly you don't feel God anymore. That's what happens. Welcome to life.

So notice when temptation comes, it doesn't feel like God's anywhere near. It feels like He's a long way off, and that temptation's real close. That's the nature of a wilderness experience, it doesn't feel like God's so close. How many know those kinds of experiences? They're horrible. I hate them. Fortunately I know that they prepare you, so no one likes a wilderness, but there are some wonderful things about the wilderness. It's a preparation, not a destination. It's a place of testing, and that word 'test' means, to prove the kind of quality, character that you have. So it's an opportunity for God to put on display, the kind of character, the kind of person you are, and the depth of your relationship with Him. So interestingly when Job was walking down the - notice that God spoke to the devil and said: do you notice my mate Job, what a good kind of guy he is? Then God's pointing out and showing off His servant. The devil says: oh, I tell you what, let me hit him a bit, and then you watch him complain. He said okay, have a go - and he did, and Job never complained.

God said: do you notice my servant down there, he's pretty good isn't he aye? [Laughter] Well you just let me smite him with boils, and you watch, he'll curse You! Okay - but you look at the end of Job, and you find the end of Job, he was doubly blessed. He came out with double portion anointing. Now of course everyone wants double portion anointing. I tell them get away from me, I want it myself. There's a way to get it. You have to go through some experiences with God. People say oh, lay hands on me, I want the anointing, want the anointing! Welcome to some wilderness time. Get alone with God, and begin to find your way into God in the midst of difficulty, and you'll come out in the power of the Holy Ghost. People want the soft thing - come up the front, and I believe in altar call, believe in laying hands, impartation, but my observation over years is most people lose it within a day. Why? Because they never played their part in the season of preparation, and there's important things to recognise in those seasons of preparation.

So pressure reveals what's in our heart. Notice what God says: He brought you into the wilderness, that He might know you. Does that mean God doesn't know you? Of course He knows you. In other words, He wants us to have an experience together, where our heart is exposed. This is intimacy. The word 'no' there is the word 'yada', meaning intimate love connection, so the wilderness is a time of intimate love connection with God. Oh, I thought you said it was a tough time? Well it is kind of a tough time, but it's actually designed to get your heart out to the open where God can see it, you can see it particularly, and a chance for you to become intimate with God, because in the wilderness God formed covenant marriage relationship with Israel. In the wilderness God encountered them. In the wilderness God helped them. In the wilderness God provided for them, in fact they never lacked in the wilderness at all. It was a place of encountering, experiencing God, and deepening character and relationship with Him.

He said: that He would know you, what was in your heart, and that you might know man shall not live by bread alone, but every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. But He said you need to experience the reality that the life you're going to live in the world, is a life of faith, depending on God. What we want is to have the smooth life, and get all the blessings. God wants the faith life, and faith doesn't necessarily feel good. You don't feel any great anointing on you when you're going through a wilderness experience, but that doesn't mean God isn't there. You've got to hold onto His words. You've got to trust His character, and when you see what comes up in your heart, in the wilderness time, you can be shocked. I've been through a few wildernesses - pressures, and the wilderness reveals what's in our heart, and so sometimes in the wilderness I've felt I wanted to have a drink. It was all I could do to stop thinking about having a drink. It wasn't a way to solve the wilderness, but it looked like it could solve it. [Laughter] Have a few drinks. Have one - have a couple, have three. Have the whole bottle, you'll feel a lot better. [Laughter] I did too [laughs] but that's alright, you learn to get out and grow and become a bit different. Don't tell me you haven't tried that either. [Laughter]

But all sorts of things come out in the wilderness - quite surprising, there you are on your own, doesn't feel like God's around, and suddenly this pressure's on you. Bitterness comes up, if it's in your heart. Offences come up, if they're in your heart. They all come out on display. Pride comes up, if it's in your heart. Whatever's in your heart comes up in the wilderness, just shows itself. People see it. If you've got judgement in your heart, that'll always come up too; critical attitudes, oh they'll all come up too. If you've got a victim mindset, that'll come up. You know what also gets dealt with in the wilderness? Soulsh attachments, the things that we love that comfort us, and we prop our life up with. Well those, they get shown up for what they are too. Sometimes God takes them away, sometimes He calls you to repent and let them go. He wants us to trust Him, wants us to walk by faith, and so wilderness experiences help us deepen the quality of our relationship. Isn't that lovely?

Fears come up in the wilderness. All your world's falling apart, you'll be surprised what depth of fear can be inside you, surprised. It grips your belly, and there you are, you love God and you're worshipping God, and you've got this

deep fear gripping your belly, that you've got to face and overcome. That's wilderness time. It's possible to overcome these things. That's what they were for. They were to grow the people, not destroy them. Now notice here's the last thing; the wilderness is tailor made by God for you, so no one has to prepare one for you. God makes it for you, and it's tailor made for your enlargement, and for your blessing. Notice God's plan: if you are in a wilderness now, and you're walking through a wilderness, God's plan is to do you good, because He's a good God, and He doesn't mess up. You say: well you don't know what I'm going through. No, welcome to your wilderness. What's out the other side of it for you though, the joy ahead? You've got to keep thinking it's a faith walk, and so everyone, if you want to be a leader, great. Welcome. You'll have a wilderness experience sometime - may have more than one, and you'll just want to give up, but you can't.

In the wilderness people do quit. People quit in the wilderness. I've watched over the years, I've seen many - I've seen pastors, I've seen leaders, I've seen congregation members, quit God in the wilderness. You watch their life - they had many reasons for quitting, many reasons for leaving, but in the end I watch their lives what happens. It's not good, because you are called to greatness, and when you fail and draw back from God, He says my soul has no pleasure in him that draws back. You do open your life to all kinds of other problems, so escaping the pressure, the best way to escape is to run into God, never to run away from God. He will always give you the option, so I think God: I'll run, I'll place my hands in the hands of the Lord. [Laughs] Okay, let's have a look here in Luke, Chapter 4. Then the spirit Jesus was filled with the Holy Ghost, and He returned from Jordan, was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. Oh my God, the devil's in the wilderness! [Laughter] It's full of devils! Predators! That's what a wilderness was like. It's full of scorpions and snakes. Fortunately God has given us authority over serpents and scorpions, and all the power of the enemy, nothing shall harm you. You don't have to be scared of it.

So notice this - And the devil said to Him: if You are the Son of God, command this stone become bread. And He said: it is written man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. So then the devil took Him up a high mountain. Ever thought how he did that one? That is a high level spiritual encounter, transported from one place to another, by the devil. Man, that'd freak you out, wouldn't it? And the devil said: all this authority I will give You, and their glory, for it's been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I want. If You worship me, it'll all be Yours. Get behind Me Satan! It's written, you shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve. Then he brought Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said: if You're the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here, for it's written: He'll give His angels charge over you, to keep you, and in their hands they'll bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone. He said: it's written, you shall not tempt the Lord your God; then the devil finished temptation, he departed from Him until a better opportunity presented itself.

In other words, Jesus gave the devil a whipping! How did He do it? Was it with the anointing? Think about that. He used the word of God, in His mouth, a sharp two-edged sword. You've got to have the word, can't just have experiences, got to be grounded in the word. Now you notice what the pressure - the pressure came on three areas. Now when we go back to the experience Jesus had, this is what God said to Him. He got the touch of the Holy Ghost on Him, got the anointing of the Holy Ghost on Him, then God spoke into Him these words: This is My beloved Son; or in other words, this is who You are, You are the Son of God. That's who You are. You're the Son of God, and not only that, I love You. I love You. You're precious to Me. That's what He got from heaven. That was a revelation. Now what does the devil say? Oh really, Son of God? If You're the Son of God, if You are who You say You are, You have to do something to establish it.

See, so who are you? Underneath all of that, who are you? Well if we ask the question, who are you, most people say something like this; I'm an accountant. No, no, I asked who are you? Er, this is my name. No, who are you? If you keep asking the question after a while, you find a lot of people say actually, I don't really know, I don't really know. So notice the devil tempts Him to put on a mask, or to establish His identity, who He is, in three different ways. The first one, you notice what he says. He says well change these stones into bread. The first one is the performance trap: I am what I do. Who are you? I'm an accountant or I'm a teacher, I'm a preacher. What if you're not preaching, who are you then? Oh I don't know. See preacher, that's what you do. You're not what you do. You are who you are. Who are you? Ooh, I don't really know. Well we need to find out who we are in Christ, or we'll define ourself by what we do. So the world pressures you, well what have you done with your life? Ooh oh, not very much. Conclusion: well you're not much of a person, you must be a failure.

That trap, traps many people; well you're not doing much, you can't be much then, can you? Can you, I mean really? I mean if you were something, you'd have done something with your life. Oh what a mess you've made of your life. Really what have you done? I haven't really done too much at all. Really you've wasted what you've done, you've failed, and here you are, this age, and what have you done? Notice it's attaching your identity to what you do, and when you attach identity to what you do, you'll become a driven man, and you can't stop doing what you do. You can't give up what you do. Why? Because your whole identity is attached to it, and someone talks about or criticises what

you do, you will erupt and defend. Why? Because when they touch what you do, they touched who you are. Jesus rebuked it with the word of God.

The second thing is possessions: I am what I have. So he said: look at this, look at this. I'll give it all to you. You can have it all! You can have it all! Little wee catch, just got to bow down. It's not too much, you can have it all. Now notice what it is; identity there is attached to possessions. Well, what kind of car have you got? Oh, I see, an old Ford aye, oh okay. What car - ooh a BMW! Ooh, you must be something! Oh, an old heap, you must be nothing. Notice people do it? They attach value or identity to possessions: so what do you have? Oh, well I have a lovely two storey house out in Havelock North with a pool and two cars, and one of them is a Jag. Oooh you must be special! And who are you? Oh well I live out at Flaxmere, and I have a small house, and we don't have a car, we have bikes, we get around on bikes. Oh! [Laughter] You got the idea? We had our season as pastors. We had no car, and we had bikes for the whole family - you, a Pastor? You don't seem to have much. No, we don't really, but we have one another, and we love God. It doesn't really matter does it? [Applause]

So we had to go through that wilderness, didn't have a thing. I wonder how we're going to get by - but you know what? We found God in it, and it didn't matter. You can have it, and give it away, so I have no attachment really to things now. Have them, we give them away, just like that, give them away. The reason is because I'm not defined by what I have, I'm not defined by what I do. When I was leading a movement of churches, and they said they couldn't get over why I'd resign off that and let it go. They could not understand it. I said: well I'm not what I do. God called me to do that, now He's said: let it go, so I've let it go, it's no big deal. But for others it was a big deal, because the position was very important. Are you defined by your position, title and what you do, or what you have, you know, your possessions and lovely body ra-ra-ra? What if it gets old and saggy, oh! [Laughter] You don't have much do you. Unfortunately that's the route we're all going to take, you know? [Laughter] We need all the help we can get to make it look good. [Laughs] But we're not defined by what we have!

Okay and here's the next one. The devil tried to define Him by popularity: Oh, I am what people say I am! I am what people think of me. That's not bad is it? So you end up living to please people. What do you think? There used to be that Yes Minister programme on TV, and his whole thing was defined by what are the people thinking. You can't worry about what people think. They're going to think what they think anyway. If they think you're a nerd, well they're going to think you're a nerd, you know, so what? They're allowed to think what they like. But you understand, if we define ourselves by what people think about us, it's a real problem, because you can't be true to yourself, and you can't be true to what God says. You can't be true to your destiny, and you can't be true to the things God's put in your heart; the desires, dreams, gifts, passions. The problem is when you become a Christian, suddenly there's almost all this pressure and expectation comes on. Now you have to do this, you have to be this, you have to - and it's like this huge pressure to conform. Where did it come from?

It didn't come from God. It's often a manifestation what's already in your heart, the need to feel accepted, or fit in in some kind of way, a need to please people. When we please people, we can't be the servant of God, and so the issue of identity is a crucial one. That's what the devil pushes on, and wilderness testings, test our attachment to things, what we own, to positions. They test our attachment to people. Basically they test where your identity is found, whether you are founded and grounded, that even if I have nothing, and have lost everything, am doing nothing, look like a failure, and people think I'm hopeless, nevertheless I am who God says I am. Moses didn't look too good in the wilderness after he had a warrant out for his murdering someone - but he was a man of God. David didn't look too good in a cave hiding out with all his desperate men who were failures and losers - nevertheless he was a king. Jesus didn't look too good hanging out on the cross - He was the king of kings. There are times you don't look so good, but listen, they're followed by times when God does something really great, if you can respond right in that time. You've got to respond right.

So notice that everyone had expectations on Jesus, just like they've got expectations on you. Now here's the thing: Jesus never lived out of expectations of people, or to please people; and so as a result, He upset everyone at some point. He upset His parents. He upset the people in His home town, they got offended with Him. He upset His disciples. Some didn't follow Him anymore, and all of them ran away, and one betrayed Him. He upset the religious leaders, when He didn't do what a rabbi's supposed to do. He upset the king. When the king wanted Him to do miracles, He wouldn't do a miracle for him. He upset the people, he upset everyone at some point, but you know what? He lived true to who He was, and this whole politically correct thing is all about trying to please, and look nice, and make people happy and feel good. It's got nothing to do with being a godly man or woman, and to do that, you have to face times when you may not look at all; or you may find you're going through a stripping and you're like a tree in the middle of winter. Nevertheless you have not changed. You are still who God says you are. You are still going where God says He's taking you, IF you keep hold of Him. It's a wonderful season, [applause] great season to be in. So how to flunk your wilderness test. [Laughs] How to flunk it in some - five easy lessons on how to flunk a test.

Here it is, I'll give you them quickly because I want to get to how you succeed, but I thought flunking, you might recognise the flunkers - or you're perhaps sitting next to one you know, never know. [Laughter]

Anyway here we go, you'll know as soon as I read them out. Let's just go into Numbers, Chapter 6:14. Fortunately the Bible tells how to flunk the test, and the Bible's full of examples of people who flunked. I like that. I love that about the Bible. It doesn't worry about whether you look good, because almost all the great men of the Bible didn't look good at some time. At some point they look really, really bad - like Abraham, the great man of faith, the father of our faith. Someone says is that your wife? Aah no. [Laughter] It's my sister. [Laughter] Oh really? Well I might take her into my house then. Yeah, yeah, okay. [Laughter] It doesn't look good does it? It isn't good is it either - but he's still called a man of faith. See, so God never worries about the fact we've got weaknesses, lacks, flaws and difficulties and shortcomings. See, trying to be perfect, it doesn't work. Just God gives us grace, and He gives us two things; one, He gives us grace; grace to grow, change and be who we're called to be, but not grace to be what someone else wants you to be. If you try and be what someone else wants you to be, you'll be frustrated and burdened all your life. It's so crucial to discover who you are, and fulfil it, what you're called to do and your destiny, and that you don't run to someone else's whistle. We listen to the Holy Ghost, and live out our life as God calls us to, learning how to do that.

Well anyway they flunked the test, look at this. So Numbers, Chapter 14: So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, they wept all night. I've done that - and then all the children of Israel complained. I've done that. [Laughter] The whole congregation said: if only we'd died in the land of Egypt! We should have died in the land of Egypt! We should have died in this wilderness! Why has the Lord - why Lord have you brought us into this land to fall by the sword, and our wives and children should be victims? Better to go back to Egypt? So they said: let's select a leader, we'll return to Egypt. Notice here there's a number of things of people flunking the test. There are all the signs they're flunking and the first sign is weeping, full of self-pity, why me? We've all done that too, have a pity party, and you're the only one there. [Laughter] It's a grand party, goes on - sometimes it can go on for days. Heaviness, depression, sad, poor me, and it's really bad, no one notices how bad it is for me. Why don't you all notice? You don't care, all that kind of stuff. It's all part of it - and complaining. So of course a sign you're flunking is when you're complaining.

Complaining is usually a statement of unbelief, that I don't believe God works all things together for my good, so I'll complain. So complaining is a big problem, complaining, negative talk. Complaining - and who'd they complain against? We've got to find someone to blame, so you find someone's who's visible; you look like you're a leader, I'll complain about you! It's your fault. You brought us here. It was all your idea, sat there in the back of the wilderness, dreamed up this whole idea to get us to where we are now. Look at the mess we're in. You! That's what people do. You're flunking, blaming others. See, you've got to find someone to blame when you're going through a hard time. You're flunking. When you blame someone else, you lose total power, because someone else is holding the responsibility for your life. Don't blame anyone else, just reach out to God and find out how to step up, and what you can do to make the thing different - but blaming, you're flunking. See? You'll have to repeat it again.

Victim mindset, notice our children and our wives will be all victims. Actually they had a total victim mentality. They lived like slaves, and God wanted them to become mighty men of faith that could take a land; but to move from being slaves, thinking victim thinking, blaming, mindsets of self pity and angry, and blaming this and that, He had to shift that stuff out of them, to get them saying: God is with us, we can do it! We'll take that land! We'll slay those giants! How do you get it out of you? Well not by someone laying hands on you. You've got to go through a bit of tough time, and you then choose, as you see what comes up, to respond to the word of God, the word of God. That's why you've got to be in the word, otherwise you'll have very little substance. You'll live out of feelings. So there it is.

Then finally they rebelled and left. Let's get another leader. [Laughs] We don't like this leader. We'll leave, and we'll go back to Egypt. Now putting it simply, what it means is, people stop coming to church. We go down and have time in the pub instead. They're never happy down there either, because actually they've been overthrown in the wilderness, so they're not happy there. They're full of offence and hurt. They've been overthrown in the wilderness. God would help them get up, but it requires repenting of the unbelief, and letting go the disappointment, all the stuff that got into the heart. Over the years I've seen people get all kinds of things in their heart, all kinds of perceptions, and they often got things wrong, they had partial information, they never really found out what was going on. They just assumed and judged, all kinds of things - end up then out in the dark, in the cold, and angry and bitter, and still blaming someone else. There it is, it's all there: flunk! Flunk!

You say how are you getting on to moving to your destiny? Oh flunked! My bones are here, bleached in the sun, in the wilderness. That's what happens, then you want to feel better, so you've got to find some way to fill the pain, so you've got to fill it up with this, fill it up with that, fill it up with something else: work, busyness, buy some things, do this, do that, pleasure, all kinds of things. We've got to fill up the pain, but the deal is - you flunked. When the test God allowed you to go through, to prepare you for your destiny, when it came, you didn't see it for what it was, and you

just let your old nature, unbelief rise up, and flunked in the wilderness. Terrible thing to do isn't it? Bet you know some people who did that. You haven't done that, but you know people who did that don't you? I don't want to do that, I think dear God, I've been close to it a few times, but however I didn't. God's grace, God... so how do we get through?

Here it is. We'll give you the simple keys how to get through the wilderness. My servant Caleb, he had a different spirit to everyone else. He has wholly followed Me. He believed My word. So we'll just pick it up, 1 Corinthians 10. You'll find out here's the keys. You want to memorise this verse: There's no temptation overtaken you which is not common to man; but God is faithful, and with that temptation will make a way of escape, you may be able to bear it. I know that verse. I've memorised that verse. That's a powerful verse. Here it is, here's the simple keys out of that verse. Here's the first thing. One, other people have experienced it too. You're not the only one you know. There's nothing new under the sun. Whatever you're facing, someone else is going through it, gone through it, is going to go through it. All stuff we face is common. Everyone goes through this kind of stuff.

The second thing is God is faithful. He will never abandon you, He'll stand by you in the midst of whatever you're going through. Here's the next thing: He says He will make sure you're not tempted beyond what you're able, so here's one of the best things you get from that. He will make sure that whatever happens to you, is not beyond what you're able. You know what that means? You've got the capacity to come through winning. It's like He can measure just how much you get. He knows just how much it takes to shift you, and no more. Now when you're on the other side, and when you're getting this stuff - aah! My life is falling apart, I'm a mess. No, it just knew how much to melt you, until you opened your heart at a different level and leant on Him. Notice the last thing He says here, make a way of escape that you can bear it. God will always provide an avenue to walk through it. He will provide strength and direction, absolutely certain. He will give strength and direction, see?

So here's a few things you could ask in the middle of your wilderness. You could ask: what is the actual struggle that I'm facing? What is the issue that I'm facing? What is it really that's going on that's causing me the trouble? What am I learning in this? What's being revealed about me, or about God in the middle of it? What is it I need to let go of or change? Now what word do I need to hold on and believe? Now there's no shortcuts to becoming a man or woman of God. There's no Bible school you can go through, that'll make you a man of God. There's no leadership course you can do that'll make you a man of God, or necessarily a great leader. You have to go through God's wilderness times. See, we look at Ian Clayton. Ian is travelling the world now, and been asked to conferences all over the world, so how come someone from Hastings that no one's ever heard of is now speaking all over the world, and in demand all over the world? Well Ian had a long wilderness experience, and he used it well. I want what he's got. Oh, well welcome to the wilderness then. [Laughter] Just teach me, lay hands on me, tell me all you know. I can't, you have to learn this.

I think of Lyn, who carries a tremendous anointing to heal and to touch people's lives, and you say lay hands on me, I want your anointing, I want your anointing! Welcome to the wilderness. I know what she had to experience to carry what she carries, some of it anyway. You see people want things, but there is a way that God brings them to us, and God has ahead for you, a land full of amazing promises, amazing blessings, amazing abundance - but will you qualify yourself, by responding when God is touching heart attitudes? Will unbelief rise up, or will faith, and a right attitude? When the people of God faced this problem in the wilderness, they complained, cried, sat down, complained, did all kinds of stuff. This is what Caleb did: he said listen, God's with us, He's going to help us. These giants are bread for us. Don't rebel. Don't quit, don't resist. Stand up! God's best days are ahead for us.

That day when he said that a line was drawn, who will agree with that? Who will agree with the evil report? Two million people agreed with the evil report, and perished in the wilderness; two men stood strong in what God said. If God said He can do it, He can do it, and those men went in. Joshua, Caleb and all the generation under 30. What a great thing. God has great things ahead for us. He definitely has great things ahead, not only for us, for His church. Globally the best days of the church are ahead, but there'll be lots of reasons why you could stumble right at this time. There'd be lots of reasons to fall over, fail, quit and give up - but don't do it! Get your eyes fixed on the Lord! Get a hold of the word of God, and in the midst of it, let God help you grow. Then you will be prepared for the things He's about to pour out.

I believe God will pour His spirit out in a great measure on the church. I believe we're coming into an hour of the saints ministry, an hour when the church worldwide is going to break out, and burst out, and go in and possess the land, and carry the supernatural. But if God was pouring out the supernatural, would you have the character and faith to carry it? There's the question, not whether or not God wants to give it. He's already said He's going to do it. The glory of the Lord shall fill the earth - and God spoke that, at the very time a generation failed, and two stood up and said: we're going to hold on to God and believe for Him. I'm believing for great things in God, great future, better future, bigger things, different things. It is a new day, it's a great new day, but oh my, I want to be ready. I want to be

fully ready for it when it comes. I want to embrace all the things that God's doing and saying, and get into His presence.

In the middle of the wilderness, is a place to know Him. In Song of Solomon, in the last chapter, it said: who is this, coming up out of the wilderness, leaning on the arm of her beloved? Glorious bride that Jesus prepared. Where was she coming? A wilderness, a difficult time, difficult season. What was she doing? She was in a place of faith, leaning, leaning into God. You know maybe you've gone through your wilderness time, and have failed and flunked. Don't worry, God saw that coming too. He said to Peter: Peter, you're going to flunk. No, I'll never flunk, I'll never flunk, you can trust me. Peter, you're going to flunk, He said but its okay, I've prayed that your faith won't fail, and after you've flunked, and you get back up on your feet again, then you can strengthen others. So isn't that good? You can't miss. You can't lose. All you can do is lie down and not get up, but God wants you up. He wants all of us up. Come on, let's just stand right now shall we?

Summary Notes

[Formatted »](#) [Back to Top »](#)

Introduction:

- Luke 3:22 "... the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove..."
- Luke 4:1 "When Jesus being filled with the Holy Spirit ... was led by the holy Spirit into the wilderness"
- Luke 4:14 "Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit ..."
- 'The wilderness' is a place of preparation for your destiny to be fulfilled
- The Kingdom has a system of passing tests to qualify you for enlargement
- Tests in the Kingdom are about leaning to trust God and develop character

The Purpose of Wilderness Testing:

- a) Wilderness Experiences are a preparation for enlargement/fresh move of God
- Bible examples: Moses, Israel, David, Elijah, John the Baptist, Jesus
- All the great men of God had experience to prepare them for their destiny (Word picture – a tree in water)

b) Lessons from Israel's Wilderness Experience:

Deut 8:2,3,16

- i. God led them into the wilderness v2. Wilderness = 4057 OT = uninhabited place; solitary, desolate. The wilderness journey was God's idea – it was a journey not a destination
- ii. The wilderness experience was for preparation not destinations
- iii. The wilderness was a place of humility – of experiencing lack. Wilderness experiences include: pressure, lack, injustice, misunderstanding, opposition, apparent failure, temptation
- iv. The wilderness is a place of testing. Test = to prove or examine the quality of our relationship
- v. Pressure reveals what is in our heart (know = yada = to be intimate) Bitterness, offense, pride, critical, judgmental, motivations, attitudes, soulish attachments, fears, unbelief
- vi. The wilderness is Tailor made by God for our enlargement and blessing v16 "to do you good at the end"
- vii. The wilderness is a place of deepening intimacy and trust

3. Jesus' Wilderness Experience:

- Luk 4:3-12
- Pressure came on Jesus in 3 areas related to His identity
- "If you are" => a challenge to His identity
- Key issue: Who are you? How do you define your identity? Will you put on a mask and play a part?
- i) Performance Trap v3 "I am what I do"
- What have you achieved? What do you do?

ii) Possessions Trap "I am what I own"

- What do you own? You are nothing unless possess you things

iii) Popularity Trap "I am what other people think"

- When you live to please people you cannot be true to who you are and your calling
- Everyone had expectations that they tried to put on Jesus
- Jesus lived true to himself, and his calling, identity and disappointed people constantly e.g. parents, members of his hometown, disciples, religious leaders, crowds

Note: The Word of God was the weapon He used to vanquish the accuser

4. How to Flunk your Wilderness Test

- Israel flunked the test God gave them 1 Cor 10:5-6
- Evidence of flunking Num 14:1-4
- (i) Weeping – self-pity v1
- (ii) Complaining v2
- (iii) Blaming other v2
- (iv) Victim mindset v3
- (v) Rebellious and leaving v4

- They flunked because they believed the negative reports instead of believing God

5. Graduating with Distinction:

Num 14:24 "My servant Caleb because he has a different spirit in him and has wholly followed me ... I will bring into the land"

1 Cor 10:13

a) 4 Things to remember in your wilderness

- Other people have experienced it too
- God is faithful, He will stand by me
- I have the capacity to handle this
- God will provide strength and direction to get me through

b) 4 Things to Ask in your wilderness

- What is the struggle/issue I am facing?
 - What is being revealed about/in me?
 - What do I need to let go of/change?
 - What "Word of God" do I need to hold on to/believe?
-
- How are you doing in your wilderness testing?
 - What promise of God is shaping your response and destiny
 - Peter – "When you are converted, strengthen your brethren"

Wilderness Wisdom (2 of 4)

Sun 2nd May 2010 AM [« Back to Top](#)

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It helps if we just understand that the wilderness was God's idea, that that difficult season was His idea. All major men in the Bible had times or seasons which you would call a wilderness. A wilderness was a very dry place, full of wild animals, it was very difficult. It represented a very difficult season, a difficult time.

Could open your Bible with me in Deuteronomy Chapter 8. I want to just continue another thing related to what I was sharing. About two weeks ago I shared a message on Wilderness Wisdom, how to respond when you're going through a hard time - hard times come don't they aye? But they don't last. They're like everything, these too pass, so hard times come, and just because you're Christian doesn't mean it's not going to happen to you. The big decision, and the only decision you have, is when a hard time comes, when a tough time comes, when misunderstandings, difficulties, pressures, setbacks, all kinds of things like that come, here's the one question: how will I respond? Will I respond towards God, discover what God is saying, doing, and wants me to learn in this situation? Or will I harden and become bitter? That's the only choices we really have.

So I want to just look at one incident in Israel's life, but first of all I want to just get you a little perspective on it. In Deuteronomy, Chapter 8, it says you shall remember - Verse 2 - that the Lord your God led you these 40 years in the wilderness. Now notice they were in the wilderness for 40 years. It should only have been about one month. It lasted 40 years, because they didn't really learn the lessons - to humble you, test you, know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, fed you with manna which you did not know, and your fathers didn't know, that He might make you learn experientially, you can't live just by external things. Man will live by every word proceeding from the mouth of God. Now notice this in the end of Verse 16, it said: God did this, that He might do you good in the end.

It helps if we just understand that the wilderness was God's idea, that that difficult season was His idea. Through the Bible we saw people, all major men in the Bible, had times or seasons which you would call a wilderness. A wilderness was a very dry place, full of wild animals, it was very difficult. It represented a very difficult season, a difficult time. Jesus, after He was anointed with the Holy Ghost, and before He returned in the power of the spirit, went through a wilderness experience. Wilderness experiences are written about in the Bible, and listen, the Bible explicitly says 1 Corinthians 10: this was for us to learn from. So whatever they did is a great learning experience; best that they learned it, paid the price. We just read this story and learn the lesson.

Now if you can understand that this is what was going on, in Egypt - Egypt represented bondage and sin. It represents your life without Christ. Coming out of Egypt, God did it all. All they had to do was just respond. God had in mind that they would go into a land full of promises. He also has promises for you, promises for your marriage, promises for your finance, promise for business, promises for an inheritance, promises of all kinds. But between coming out of Egypt, where God did it all, they just stepped into the blessing; and going over here, here in the Canaan, the land of promises, they had to learn to walk by faith. They had to learn to possess. In fact, while they walked through the wilderness, God gave them supernatural provision every day. As soon as they got in the Promised Land it stopped. Now they had to operate kingdom principles, so Canaan represented kingdom lifestyle.

Canaan represented our life advancing the kingdom of God. It represents the church going into the community, making influence in the community, but for all of us, individually and corporately, we have to change how we think. So when they were in Egypt they were in captivity, they were in imprisonment, they were in hard bondage. In order to operate, and make an impact, and possess what God, they had to change mentalities. Here's what the wilderness is about: it's about changing how you think. It's about changing heart attitudes. It's about changing on the inside. That's what the wilderness is about; and so the purpose of the wilderness was to uncover their heart attitudes and mentalities. The first thing that happens when you're under pressure, what's in your heart comes up. Isn't that true? Isn't that true - so it's to uncover it, not to condemn, but so we can actually grow and change. So the first purpose of the wilderness was to uncover what was in the heart, and in the thinking - the mindsets; because in order to enter the land, and possess the promises, and walk by faith, they had to have certain mindsets.

They had to have an overcoming mindset, a conquering mindset, a Joshua mindset. They had to have a different mindset, so how do you shift the mindset after living in Egypt in bondage and slavery and all kinds of slave mentality? How do you shift that mentality, from there, to becoming someone who's got a faith life that can now make a

difference? Well you have to have changes, so God just allowed a few tests to come on the way - 10 of them to be exact, the fullness of testing. So He allowed 10 situations, to explore their heart and how they would respond, and what God was looking for was that they would learn to trust Him, and develop these two things: one, that they would develop a life of faith trusting God; and secondly, that they would develop inner strength and character, because you have to be tough to advance the kingdom of God. It's not for sissies. There's always resistance, always difficulties, and so a church of sissies isn't going to make a difference.

See, God wants us to grow, and become strong on the inside, strong in Him. Isn't that right? Okay, alright then, so let's go and have a look at one little example. This is the first test. Now notice this is after all the victories, so they've had all these victories. They've seen the 12 plagues, they've seen God deliver them, they've seen God open up the water, they've seen the waters close on their enemies - absolutely marvellous. Then three days later, they're in trouble; so we read it in Exodus, Chapter 15, Verse 22. It says: Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea. They went out into the Wilderness - here it is - they're in the wilderness, and they went out just a few days, three days to be exact. That's all it took to change them from laughing, celebrating, and praising God, to now having stress and strife and trouble, so that's Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, about the middle of the week in other words.

So from praising God on Sunday to the middle of the week, that's about all it was, and so the middle of the week, three days, they had no water and when they came to Marah, they couldn't drink the waters at Marah. They were bitter, so the name of it was called Marah. Should have given it away shouldn't it? And the people complained against Moses, what will we drink? He cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet. So He made a statute and an ordinance for them, and there He tested them. And He said: if you diligently heed to the voice of the Lord your God, and do what's right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep His statutes, I'll put none of the diseases on you, which I have brought on the Egyptians. I am the Lord who heals you.

There's a lot in this, and we can't do all of it in one session, but we'll just pick up - I want you to learn just a very simple lesson in this. You notice first of all, what is the experience they've had. The experience they've had is one of tremendous victory, that's three days ago, and then for three days they're without water, which means all their water supply dried out. Now remember although they're in the wilderness, there was a cloud over them, so it's not like they're under raging sun. They've actually got God with them, so every day, they can see the cloud of God's presence - so after three days the water's run out, so they're looking for water. There's an expectation of water, and the water that they get is bitter. In other words, they got their hopes up when they saw the water, then their hopes are dashed.

So it represents an experience where we struggle, and we have a season where perhaps the presence of God isn't so strong, where things are a bit difficult. We suffer lack of some kind, and then we got our hopes up that something's about to happen - and it doesn't happen! Isn't that a common experience, where what you expected, didn't come about; and what you didn't expect, happened? Well you know, you expected the bill to be paid, and it wasn't paid. It's a bit nasty when that happens isn't it? You expected something to come through, and it didn't come through. You expected this to happen, it didn't happen so your expectations were dashed. So here's the thing. You notice they were in this place called Marah. Now it tells us in Exodus, if we just take a quick look in Chapter 1, I want to read you a couple of verses there. I want you to understand the nature of the test, and what happened inside them.

It says in Exodus, Chapter 1, in Verses 13 and 14: The Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with hard bondage, or bitter or rigor. They made their lives - notice this - they made their lives bitter with hard bondage - in mortar, in brick and all manner of service. In all manner of service, they made them serve. Now what has happened is, the people have had to serve, and they've been under cruel masters. This is our life before Christ, cruel demonic masters. Sin is a cruel master. We lived in sin, and when we live in sin and in broken relationships, and we just try and do the best, we suffer; and people have various backgrounds, but everyone who comes to Christ has a story. You have a background, and your background is made up of a whole range of experiences, much of it in bondage to sin - and not only your own sin, but the sin of others. So we are impacted, not only by what we have done, and the demonic torment of that, but by what others have done to us, and our failure to resolve it. So we carry with us baggage into our Christian walk. It's in the soul. You got saved, and your spirit was saved, but your soul wasn't saved, and you've still got all the baggage.

So you notice it tells us there their lives were made bitter. What happened? They were rejected, they were put down, they were used, they suffered injustice, they were treated cruelly; so their life in the world in Egypt was a life of put downs, of rejection, of injustice, of lack, of hardship. It's like, in many ways, the life of people before we come to Christ. There are many areas we suffer, or go through difficulties and experiences in, and of course what happened was, as a result of their bondage, they didn't resolve it - they became bitter. They were bitter in their heart. They were bitter because of their background, bitter because of their experiences. I know growing up, coming up out of my

background, I grew up bitter. Bitterness is very easy to get into our heart. There's an injustice, or something happens that hurts us, it maybe repeats itself, and gets into our soul, we begin to feel resentful about it, angry and resentful about it.

If we don't forgive, and deal with it properly like God wants, it goes down deep, and begins to crawl its way down, and gets roots in our soul, roots of bitterness. I didn't feel bitter of course, no one usually really feels very bitter. Ask a person: are you bitter? They'll never say yes. I've rarely heard anyone say yes - but bitterness has a way of revealing itself, and it reveals itself when God takes us through circumstances in life which push on us, just challenge us. So one of the things is, the Bible tells us, that a bitter root defiles relationships. In Hebrews 12:15 it says: take heed lest anyone fall out of the grace of God, and there's the due as to what the answer is: grace. It says: and a root of bitterness springing up, many are poisoned or stained. Isn't that interesting, that you could stain your relationships, that you could poison your relationships, that we could defile our relationships?

So how does that happen? Well it happens when there's bitterness. Bitterness in the heart is a root that grows, and produces its own fruit. Usually when people are bitter they make judgements, and when we make judgements rooted in bitterness - well men, this is what men are like, or this is what my father, this is what people will treat me like - or we make judgements about ourself - well I'll never get anywhere, this is what's happened, this is the kind of person I am - we begin to judge people. We begin to judge ourselves, we begin to judge others. When those judgements start to form in our heart, they're rooted in bitterness, and they create almost like a bitter expectation, that whatever situation I'm in, this is what's going to happen to me. So people brought up in poverty for example, or financial hardship, you often have a real deep root of bitterness, that they'll suffer financial lack; and then every time a little bit of lack comes up, which is normal anyway in life, it just reinforces the pain: yeah, I knew it, you know?

There's this bitter echo from inside them, and bitterness can grow very deep, and it stains us, and affects our relationship. A woman marries a man who's bitter against his mother, and against women. Very soon, she will have a major problem in her marriage. He will defile the marriage by the bitterness. A woman who's bitter against her husband, because of the way her father or some other men treated her, will find herself in the end defiling the husband; and he will begin to take on the very thing she expected, because of the bitterness. Bitterness has a way of defiling and influencing everything around us, so we need to have a sweet spirit. Isn't it interesting, that after all those years of bitterness and defilement, that they've got bitterness in their heart? It's not surprising, after the way they've been treated, that they're bitter - it's not surprising at all. A girl comes up out of a home where she's been sexually abused, why would we think it's a surprise she's bitter? A person comes up, and their father's abandoned them. Why would we be surprised that they're bitter? Of course they're bitter.

A person's gone through injustice and hardship, and bad treatment, of course they're bitter. When you don't have Christ you don't know what to do. You just take it into yourself, and in the end you form judgements, and these roots go down into the heart, but they don't disappear when you get saved. When you got saved, your spirit was saved. Now you have to journey with God, and in order to come into the promises of a great marriage, a great family, great prosperity, we've got to let God work in our heart, to shift those old mindsets, and those old things that would hinder us becoming the people of God. So if God is wanting to shift you, or shift your marriage, or shift the church, He's got to shift us in our heart, shift us in our beliefs, shift us in the way we are. So of course the way He does it, sets up a few things to press on us a bit.

The Bible says that if we judge others - Matthew 7, Verses 2 and 3 - if we judge others, we ourselves will reap with the judgement. So if I judge others in a certain way, very soon I'll find I'll be experiencing those things in my life. You know, you start to find you judge people: oh, that person's such and such a person, this kind of person, pretty soon I'll be finding, I'm reaping that very thing in my life. So the Bible says first of all get the beam out of your own eye, and you can see clearly. Here's the problem with judgement. When you judge a person, that means you look at their behaviour, you look at that person, and then you pass a sentence on it: well this is what I think! Some people just call it - its opinions. But when we have opinions based on appearances, and judgements on appearances, this is what happens is, your eye is so full of blocks, you can't even see anything clearly - so it says first remove the judgements out of your life, the log out of your eye, then you can see clearly to help the other person.

Very often when we look at other people, we evaluate and judge them on their behaviour, what you see. The Bible says: God doesn't look on man from the outside; He looks on the heart. We tend to judge people by what we see, how they turn up, their appearance, their behaviour. We've got no idea what's going on. We've got no idea the pain that's going on in their life, got no idea what they may be struggling with, we just see how they behave, and come to a judgement. Usually it's a judgement that passes a sentence upon them. When we do that, we're now positioned to reap the same judgement in our own life. We now have become blinded to reality. You can't see clearly unless you've actually got judgements out of your heart. You imagine, if you've got a little spec in your eye, and someone says

please let me help you get that speck out of your eye, I know exactly what to do. As they lean over with a little wee scalpel, to get this thing out of your eye, you observe that their whole eye is blocked by a big beam, and that they can't see at all. You won't let them near your eye.

Why won't you let them near your eye? Two reasons: one, they can't see; and two, they've got no sensitivity to what you would need to be set free. So when there's judgements in our heart, it's impossible for us to really help anyone. The reason is because one, we can't see the true issues, we're looking superficially, and we're blinded by our own heart; and two, we have no sensitivity and compassion how to deal with the person's heart. One of the great things that's needed in our life, is for the Holy Ghost to bring grace to us, to remove bitterness, so we can see clearly and have compassion for people. Then you're positioned to help them. So what is the first test God takes them to? Isn't it interesting, it's the waters of bitterness, the bitter water. So what does He do? He just gets their hopes all up, there's some water there. First of all He suffers a bit of lack, there's no water, then there is water, and then it's bad water. In other words, at first we're struggling, then there's a glimmer of hope, and then it just sinks.

Now immediately that happens for you, something will emerge from your heart. What emerges from your heart, is the very thing that reveals what's going on in your heart, see? So there's fruit; whenever a person's got bitterness in their heart, there's always a fruit. There's always a fruit for the root. So if you ask someone - how many people here are bitter? Well you'd probably say no one's bitter, they're all lovely people in here. We've just been worshipping Jesus. [Laughs] It'd be wonderful if we had no bitter people here - but actually I've picked it up in myself at times. I've picked it up in a whole number of ways really. Let me tell you some of the ways you can pick it up. You can pick it up - it's always got a fruit, got a fruit, you can see the fruit. Here's the thing, you'll see it in a person's countenance. If a person's bitter, you'll see it around their face, particularly around the mouth. It shows in the mouth. The mouth begins to twist, and become tight, and you'll see it on the face, etched into the face. Bitterness eventually etches itself into a person's face.

Another place you'll see it is in the words they speak, the most common way is the words they speak. Usually what you'll find is, they'll be very negative; negative or critical, fault-finding. Now you see fault-finding, there's no faith in that. Fault-finding does not advance the kingdom of God. What advances the kingdom of God is faith. See faith sees what could be, and calls it forth; fault-finding says: you've got this wrong with you, we've got to fix it up before you can go forward. Actually it's not how God works. He never worked that way, He says: come to Me, and just respond to Me, and let Me put something into you, and you'll grow and you'll change. So fault-finding, judging, condemning, these are the kinds of things - here's another thing that bitterness shows up. Bitterness shows up in the inability to be thankful to people, or to express gratitude. Now you have a think: who has blessed your life? Did you show them gratitude? Did you, at any time, say: thank you, when you did this, it was such a blessing to me?

People who are bitter can't say thank you. They never say thank you. It's just impossible to say thank you. Why? Because bitterness won't let gratitude flourish; and so relationships, always there's a demand, that somehow you've got to provide - somehow you've got to fix this thing up, because the bitterness is rooted in injustice, and a demand that you've got to do something. So it can't be fixed. It can't be fixed. The person has to repent, and be changed, so what does God do? God takes them to the waters of Marah. Now notice what happens, two responses here at the waters of Marah. First of all the people's response - what was the first thing they did? They - what did they do? Complained. Who did they complain against? They complained against Moses. He had nothing to do with it. It was God's idea, the wilderness; and the waters of Marah - he had no control over that whatsoever; but people who are bitter, have to find somewhere to put the poison on. You just have to. You can't put it on yourself, you can't even dare to look at yourself. You've got to put it out there, so you don't look inward, and so what they did was they complained.

That word 'complain' means - it's the word from which the modern Hebrew word 'hotel' comes from, to lodge overnight. So in other words, they had a resentment and a grudge that hung around overnight. They actually got resentful. They were resentful - first of all they had their hopes up, then their hopes are dashed, now they're looking for someone to blame. The bitterness manifests: Moses! and they begin to complain, and become bitter; and they've got to find someone to be bitter against, so they're bitter against Moses. Actually they were bitter against God, because what they're saying is: God, You don't know what You're doing, You're messing up. Actually the cloud was with them all the time. You would think they'd know that God was there. There's a cloud by day, and fire by night, it's there every day and every night - the presence of God is there every day, yet they're complaining against Moses, that Moses has somehow stuffed it up.

Now what Moses did was different. See now Moses, in the midst of a pressure like that, did the thing you can do, which is to reach out to God, so he cried out to God. I want you to see three things that happened when he cried out to God: number one, he got revelation. You see when you're going through a difficulty, the one thing you need is God's perspective - God, what are You trying to do in this situation? God, what do You want me to learn in this

situation? Now I find it surprising, when people are going through difficulties, how few actually become God-oriented, and ask God: what are You wanting to teach me? What do You want me to learn? How do You want me to respond? What is showing in my heart? Now that's the response of a man of God, or woman of God, but I find people look for someone to blame, or they get angry, they criticise, they fire up, go and have a drink or any kind of thing, but the one thing that's missing is just to come near to God and ask Him.

Now when you ask God for wisdom, He'll show you, give you wisdom - so notice he asked God, so God gives him three things. Three things happen: one, he gets revelation. If you're going through a trouble right now, what you need is revelation, and God can give it to you. What do you need to learn? What is the purpose of this experience? What is God wanting to teach you in it? What do you have to change in your life? What's showing up in your life? How does God want you to treat that person? Only God can show you those things. The second thing is, that God gave him revelation specifically of the cross. Notice He showed him a tree, that when the tree was put in the waters, the waters change, and the bitter becomes sweet? Now the only tree I know, that changed bitter waters to sweet, is actually this one here in the Old Testament, and the cross of Calvary in the New Testament.

You see in the midst of a difficult situation of injustice, suffering, pain and whatever, the one thing you've got to find is revelation of how the cross has dealt with this thing, and can bring you through to resurrection and life on the other side. You notice the cross is to deal with my issues, not someone else's. I don't bring someone else to the cross, I bring myself to the cross. Now you notice, He needed to bring the cross into the water, to change the water from bitter to sweet. What does that look like? Well here's an example of that. When Joseph - remember Joseph was treated terribly by his brothers. He brought a bit on himself, pride, and the way he carried on; but you know he was treated so badly by everyone, but he ends on top. He ends up out and he's filled with promises of God. He's had his 13 years wilderness, he's now in the place of destiny and guess what? When the brothers come notice what he said: It wasn't you who sent me here, it was God who sent me here.

He's not only forgiven them, he's got rid of all judgement. He's saying: listen, get over it guys, don't be hard on yourselves. Don't judge yourselves, because God was in it, behind it, and I look and I see how God has used us to get me exactly where I need to be, fully fulfilling the dream of God. Whoa! Thank You God for working through this situation. Now you notice the bitter has become totally sweet. See, that's how God can do it, but you know to do that he had to forgive him, had to let go his judgements, and had to recognise actually, that was the tool God used to get me to where he needed me to get. Now you see we love the visions, dreams, desires and all that kind of stuff, but anyone who's started up a business, and had a dream for a business, will tell you that between the dream and the reality, there's an awful lot of suffering, pain and difficulty goes on, see?

So we love the dreams and desires, but there's a journey of growth, of experience, of learning a few things, to bring you to the place, where you actually now are fulfilling what God called you to do. There's a preparation. The wilderness is always just time for preparation, so you see how he cast it, and the last thing you see there is he had to cast it in. He actually had to apply the cross to the water, so God gave him the revelation. The revelation was one of the cross, but he had to actually apply it. If you're facing a bitter experience, God wants you to see how the cross, how the injustice sufferings of Jesus Christ, have fully paid the price, to totally set you free from all that bitterness, all those judgements, all that pain. This experience is just bringing it to the surface. Now you can really deal with it, so you can move on; and so you have to apply it. No one can apply it for you. You come up in altar call, no one can apply the cross to you. You have to actually apply it yourself, by faith.

No one can repent for you. No one can turn from sin for you. No one can confess your bitterness. You actually have to own your stuff; and so what happened was when the pressure came, instead of Israel owning what was in their heart, coming and responding to God's provision, they just found somewhere to dump it, so they didn't have to face it. In the midst of every wilderness experience, every setback, every disappointment in life, the first thing is: God, what is coming up in my life? God, what is coming out of my mouth? What is in my heart? What are You wanting to teach me? How can I grow, and how can I respond to this thing, and bring forth Your will into that? And that way you grow. That's how men of God work, and this is what he did.

So I wonder where we're at? What bitter experience or disappointing experience are you facing? What trouble, difficulty, setback are you facing? Think about that; what is it? It'll be a situation of some kind, and then when you think about it, what is manifesting in your heart? What kind of response are you making? Do you hear praises to God, and gratitude to God? Do we hear gracious words flowing out of your heart; or is there a bitterness flowing out? There's a judgement, there's a demand someone else has got to do something, someone else has got to change, something else. Is there a demanding thing that comes through? What is coming out of your mouth? And if there's bitterness in your heart, you just need to face it, say: God, cleanse my heart from every trace, every root of this bitterness. Lord, heal me - and you notice what He said. This was for the healing, and God reveals Himself, not only

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