

Series Intro:

Last week we began looking at how often in life, we find ourselves in the wilderness of life. A time of testing and struggle. The Lord Jesus found himself in the wilderness, having fasted for 40 days, and even dueled Satan himself in that wilderness. But he also came out of that wilderness experience filled with power and strength in the Spirit of God.

Testing is never fun – no matter what your age! Spiritual testing can lead to a lot of confusion and frustration but God leads us to those moments so that we can find new strength and new power in Him. The wilderness is never meant to cause us to fail – it’s meant to prove we can do it and it will lead to great spiritual breakthroughs in our life!

Today we move from the wilderness into the desert. What’s the difference you are asking?
Let me explain:

Wilderness:

Overwhelming with choices
Could be a group effort
Led by the Spirit
Testing

Desert:

No relief, complete exposure, parched
You feel all alone
Find yourself there by your own acts
Redirection – Refocus

BOTH have the potential of leading us to SPIRITUAL RENEWAL & Breakthrough!

Amy is going to sing for us a new song that can help us focus on God as we go through the desert. As she is singing, we have something for you to consider. For centuries, the church has used candles to be symbolic of our prayers ...especially our desert prayers. We light candles and their flames represent the presence of God and their smoke rises toward Heaven just like our prayers.

So, as Amy sings, you may want to come and light a candle. **(light one as an example ...)** It could represent your desert experience. It could represent the need of a miracle. It could represent any prayer request you may have today. We may light a few candles today or we may light all of them ... the important question isn’t how many, it’s being faithful in calling out to God in our time of need.

Song:

This is being sung while the congregation is lighting candles ...

Sermon:

One of the things in life I could do without is going to the beach on a hot day. I’m an air conditioning kind of guy if I had the choice ... anyone with me? I guess I don’t mind the beach all that much ... it’s more of what it takes to get there that bugs me. Loading up the gear, making plans, finding a parking spot, unloading all the gear, paying for the parking

spot ... then the worst ... carrying all the gear! Walking through the sand is hard work. Being a fairly private kind of guy, finding a place to “call my own” for the afternoon at the beach is nearly impossible. I like shade and you have to create your own shade at the beach ... it’s not there naturally. Sand is everywhere ... in places it has no value of being ... and you might find it there days after the beach I might add.

After all this work of getting to the beach, we sit down, try not to look at others, and hope to God they are not looking at you. Then, it’s time to go ... and the walk to the beach through the sand seems like a walk in the park.

Why am I talking about the beach? Because when I started thinking about the desert experiences of life, the picture that flew into my mind’s eye was that miserable walk in the sand on the way out to the water. Oh, how I hate that walk. I can’t imagine being in a real desert when there is no water, no relief, no shade, no hope.

The desert is a lonely place to be and many things can take us there.

- * Sometimes we feel like we’ve been ripped off or owed something in life ... our disillusionment can take us to the desert.
- * Maybe we find ourselves in the desert because we’ve become too comfortable in life and we have taken so many things for granted ... to turn around one day and realize we are dry.
- * Or it could be that we have faced so much opposition and people going against us that we can’t relate to anyone else anymore.
- * Many times we find ourselves in the desert because we have spent so much energy trying to keep up with everyone around us and all the while we remain hollow/empty inside.
- * Sometimes we serve and we serve and we serve. We give and we give and we give. Always volunteering, helping and the tank becomes empty.
- * And sometimes, disobedience takes us to the desert ... willful decisions to walk against what we know to be true about God and His desires for our life.

Many in God’s Word have found themselves in the desert places of life. Maybe the most notable is David in my mind. He is anointed to be the next King of Israel but there was one problem ... his name was Saul and he was the current King of Israel. And while David did many wonderful things for Saul (he would play music for him and he was a mighty warrior in his army) Saul resented David because God favored David and the people sang songs about David. Saul spent the last years of his life, pursuing David and tried over and over and over again to kill him.

David wrote many songs and poems about Saul’s persecution of him and many of them are recorded in the book of Psalm. Many are laments about frustration and agony that David and his men were feeling as being faithful men who were being pursued for their life. Several times David could have killed King Saul but he didn’t because even though Saul was trying to kill him, he respected him as the King of God’s people, Israel. All the while, David was **spiritually** and **physically** in the desert throughout this era of his life.

David is credited for many of the Psalms but he likely didn't write this one ... but he certainly would have echoed its words in his life ... listen ...

Psalm 42 ...

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.

2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?

*3 My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long,
"Where is your God?"*

*4 These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude,
leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving
among the festive throng.*

*5 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him, my Savior and 6 my God.*

Or how about Psalm 63 that was written by David. This was such a powerful expression of longing and expectation for God that the early church included it among several daily prayers that Christians should pray.

Psalm 63: A Psalm of David. When he was in the Desert of Judah.

*O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you,
in a dry and weary land where there is no water.*

2 I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory.

*3 Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. 4 I will praise you as long as I
live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. 5 My soul will be satisfied as with the richest
of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you. 6 On my bed I remember you;
I think of you through the watches of the night. 7 Because you are my help,
I sing in the shadow of your wings. 8 My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.*

9 They who seek my life will be destroyed; they will go down to the depths of the earth.

*10 They will be given over to the sword and become food for jackals. 11 But the king will
rejoice in God; all who swear by God's name will praise him, while the mouths of liars will
be silenced.*

David is in the desert – he is tired and weary and he desires justice to be served in his life. He wants this experience to be over. He doesn't like the desert. He doesn't like sand blowing up his robe. But more than wanting out of the desert, he longs for the presence of God to deliver him ... "earnestly I seek you; my soul thirst for you, my body longs for you." **Can you say that today?** Do you thirst for God like that? Do you have a deep sense of longing inside of you to experience God like that?

I think in our day and age, we thirst for the wrong things too often ... I long for satisfaction, comfort, financial freedom, and speedy results. *Check-out line at Wal-mart ... waiting for this couple ... so frustrated ... instead of being moved toward compassion for the fact that she had \$14 available to her in that moment.* That's not a Pastor who LONGS for God's Spirit ... that's a Pastor who LONGS for everything to go right and fall into place.

David's longing turns into eager expectation. "But the King will rejoice in God; all who swear by God's name will praise him, and the mouths of liars will be silenced." I will rejoice in God ... my people will praise him ... no matter what happens we will never stop giving God what He is due!

I'm not sure what your desert looks like. For several here today, your desert may look like a marriage that has seen better days and you fear it could be on its last leg. Maybe it looks like a hopeless situation at work ... or even a job that you absolutely do not like. Deserts have an infinite number of sizes and shapes for each of us. **If you battle depression like me, deserts are often impossible to explain but they are undeniable in their strength and scope of your life.** Been there? I have.

How we get into the desert is critical to understand but how we get out of the desert is critical to apply to our lives and here it is ... we must find the Oasis of God's Presence.

What does this Oasis look like? Last week we talked a little about the journey through the wilderness involved "Hunger and Thirst", "The Truth of His Word" and "Trusting in the Leadership of the Spirit" and all of those remain true this morning. But let me focus quickly on two things today that I believe David shows us throughout his desert experiences.

Worship. Verse 3 ... "Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you." Let's be honest, life stinks. Life is filled with disappointments, wrong calls, bills, debt, divorce, abuse and dysfunctionality. David worships God by saying, your love is the best thing that we've got!! Your love is better than anything this world could offer me. Your love gives me hope in my grieving and gives me joy in my pity parties. Your love God gets me through each day!! My lips will glorify you because your love is where I find life!

When we come in this building each week, you expect certain things. You expect someone at the front door. You expect the coffee bar going. You expect uncomfortable chairs to be arranged in a nice orderly fashion. You expect a band to play songs. You expect me to preach too long ... but do you expect to worship? Those things are worship! Those things are the skin of worship. Those things are no more worship than your skin is what makes you live! The heart of worship begins with expectation and longing to meet with God.

If you are in the desert today, your journey out begins with eager expectation and a deep sense of longing to worship God ... to love him with all your heart, mind, soul and strength! We must worship Him.

Honestly, this will look differently for everyone. We aren't concerned with what it looks like ... although I can guess that this isn't looking to worshipful (how-hum look). Don't get caught up in the appearance of worship either because sometimes we go through the exterior motions but our heart is just glorifying ourselves. Worship happens publically but it's a very private matter between you and the Lord. Your lips must glorify the Lord!

Prayer. Prayer is the key to unlock the chains in your life that are holding you in your desert experience. Recently someone came to me in tears saying, “I’m praying and I’m praying but I don’t feel him and he’s not answering me.” And said, “Never stop calling out. Never stop telling him what you need and how you feel. Don’t you think for one minute those prayers won’t eventually come back to you in the form of a blessing. Don’t ever stop.”

David says, “On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night.” (6) This entire Psalm is one big prayer that is honest and transparent. I had a mother of a teen come to me one day years ago in Cincinnati. Her daughter had been coming to the church for some time and so this mother began to come as well. It had been a while since she was in church and her heart was so touched by the Spirit of God but she came to me because she felt like she couldn’t pray to God. She said, “I hear you pray and it’s so eloquent and it ordered so properly and it makes sense ... but when I pray it’s a mess.” I told her, don’t pray nice and eloquent ... pray from your heart and if it’s a mess, God still understands.

Years later we talked about prayer again and she truly became a prayer warrior for her daughters and her family. God transformed her prayer life from something that she was ashamed of to something that was raw, honest, and truly powerful.

Psalm 102: *Hear my prayer, O Lord; let my cry for help come to you. 2 Do not hide your face from me when I am in distress. Turn your ear to me; when I call, answer me quickly. 3 For my days vanish like smoke; my bones burn like glowing embers. 4 My heart is blighted and withered like grass; I forget to eat my food. 5 Because of my loud groaning I am reduced to skin and bones.*

Here’s the bottom line for today ... I want to experience a spiritual renewal and breakthrough in my life. I want to hunger after the things of God. I want the Word of God to pour over my soul and I want to have confidence in the leading of God in my life. I want to be a man of authentic worship and deep, honest and meaningful prayer. But none of that will happen because I want it to ... it will only happen when I commit to making those things a part of my wilderness and desert experiences.

We don’t need to be afraid of the desert because God has not left us there all alone. When we are dry, alone, fading away, running away ... we must learn to fight back with worship & prayer. No one here is exempt from the desert ... and through the Grace of God, everyone here can stand victorious on the other side of that desert in spiritual power, overcoming the challenges of life through the grace and mercy of God. I believe it to be true. I need it in my own life today. If you need it to, then pray with me ...

Stand for Prayer ...

FINISH AT 11:42