

Going into the wilderness can be a frightening experience. We feel unprepared, unequipped, and often lack the faith to trust in God. When God brings us out of our old way of life and calls us to create something new, we often do not know where to begin, and many times wonder why we couldn't stay where we were. In many cases, just like Israel, we are tempted to go back to our old life. The first thing to understand about the wilderness is that it is a place of testing, a place where we will face challenges. These challenges are sometimes things that God creates, and sometimes things that God allows. Whichever kind of challenge we are facing, our attitude plays a big part in our success. Here are some practices to ensure your attitude is right for facing a time of testing.

Day 1

Focus on Obedience

When facing any kind of trial or challenge, it is easy to worry about the outcome, what the result will look like, and if we will have the same level of blessing and comfort that we have grown accustomed to living. It is very easy to let our minds run wild with speculation about all the unanswered questions that any given situation gives rise to, and then to invent some questions to ponder that are completely ridiculous and could never happen. Our brains are hard-wired to use any downtime to go over these scenarios. Because of this, we must focus our minds on what we have control over, namely our obedience. God has given us all the purpose of imaging Him when he created us, and of glorifying Him when he redeemed us. God equips us to complete the purposes he gives, and does not expect us to deliver things that we are not capable of attaining. Our minds can run wild with all the what-ifs in the world if we don't focus on the simple act of being obedient in the moment. Are we being called to be truthful? Instead of asking the question about what will happen to you, your family, your career, etc., focus on telling the truth as completely as you can. Are we being called to witness? Instead of thinking about all the responses the person could give, listen carefully to what they are saying and what response would glorify God the most. God never calls us to work miracles or to control the uncontrollable, he only calls us to obedience and he equips us for his calling.

Verses: Exodus 3; Matthew 14:22-33

Prayer Topics: Trust, Faith, Focus, Worry, Anxiety, Fear

Day 2

Take Stock of Resources

When entering the wilderness and facing challenges and trials, it is helpful to focus on what you have rather than wasting time wishing for what you don't have. One aspect of the wilderness that is very helpful is that it makes us realize just how much we have that is undervalued or unnoticed. Anyone who has ever been camping has had the experience of needing an item that is not available and finding an unusual substitute when creative thinking was applied. What skills do you possess? What resources has God blessed you with? Many times, God strikes a mighty blow against his enemies with a crooked stick, and in many stories of the Bible the most unusual and underrated people have done extraordinary things because they had faith in God. God is in the business of glorifying himself, and he often does so in very surprising ways. What relationships do you have, who could help you in your current situation? God also uses the wilderness to make us aware of our need for others and makes relationships stronger when we sacrifice for one another. We have way more than we think, God is generous and makes us aware of His great blessings in creative ways.

Verses: 1 Samuel 17; Matthew 14:13-21

Prayer Topics: Trust, Faith, Appreciation of Blessings, Appreciation of Gifts, Appreciation of Others

Day 3

Accept “No” Graciously

If we are honest, we often pray for God to let us out of the trial, test, or challenge that we face. In fact, it is possible that most of our prayers are oriented toward that purpose. It will comfort us, then, to know that Jesus himself prayed for that very thing before he was crucified. Most of the time we do not know what is a test or trial, and what is just an unpleasant possibility, so we pray that anything that we can see approaching that looks slightly suspect would just pass us by. We often pray with the idea of recording or keeping track of when God answers our prayers, and by this we often mean getting what we want. Only sometimes does it occur to us that God might have answered our prayer, and that answer was negative. It takes trust to understand that God’s love is as evident when his answer is negative as when it is positive. Can we accept “no” with the same gratitude and appreciation of God’s love as “yes”? Can we appreciate that, although the test is before us, and it has not passed us by, that we are alive and blessed with a multitude of blessings beyond number? Can we be thankful that God has, in his answer, assured us of his love and that the outcome will address some need of ours that a different outcome would not? Can we trust that God gives us what we need even when he refuses to give us what we want? Can we, in humility, admit that we don’t really know what we need and that God’s love for us is strong enough to disappoint our wants while addressing needs we aren’t even aware exist?

Verses: Daniel 3; Matthew 26:36-46

Prayer Topics: Trust, Gratitude, Provision, Wisdom, Strength, Discernment, Love

Day 4

Give Thanks for the Present

When facing a trial or tribulation one of the hardest things to do is to focus on the present. It is so easy to think about all the things that might happen, to wrap all the trial difficulties that may take days, months, or even years to take place into the present and live them as an extended now. No matter what you are going through, you are not dead. Being alive, being loved and blessed by God, being led through a trial that will meet a need and help to bring glory, all these things are a present reality in any situation that we face. In living in the present moment, two things must be resisted. One, the propensity we all have in loading up the future with all kinds of worries and living with them now. Two, rehashing our past mistakes, failures, and wrongs *ad infinitum*. God is gracious in allowing us to retake tests, the problem is we are often haunted by past failures and think that we therefore are doomed to relive past performances. The reality is that God makes us new creations, and we can replace old memories of failures with new memories of God’s faithfulness. Whether our problem involves past or future, the key is to be thankful in the present moment, to see God’s faithfulness and blessing now, and to trust Him with both our past and our future.

Verses: Daniel 6; Colossians 4:2-4

Prayer Topics: Forgiveness, Trust, Blessing, Gratitude

Day 5

Orient Toward Purpose

They say that nature abhors a vacuum, and as far as purpose is concerned, that is true. Our brains often create anxiety when they are not occupied with a purpose. Dogs and other domestic animals also often experience anxiety when a human is not giving them a purpose. When facing a test, the best mindset is a purpose-oriented mindset that is focused on achieving the glory that God desires rather than comfort, rest, pleasure, or monetary gain. God's glory is not at cross-purposes to your good, so he is able to glorify himself and help you at the same time. In fact, God's glory and our good are always connected, so that if we are focused on Him and his majesty, we will always benefit. It is always surprising to me how many times I see people (including myself) get frustrated or even angry with God as he tries to meet our needs. The problem for all of us is that we want our good, only on our terms. We want to be blessed only in ways we approve of, wanting to be rich, good looking, powerful, healthy as well as patient, kind, loving, and full of joy. The problem is that these things often work at cross purposes toward one another, therefore God gives us the blessing that exists, rather than the make-believe blessing of our imagination. Trust God in the testing of the wilderness.

Verses: Exodus 3, 1 Samuel 17, Daniel 3, Daniel 6

Prayer Topics: Faith, Trust, Love, Glory, Faithfulness