

HOW TO DEAL WITH YOUR WILDERNESS EXPERIENCE (The Power Of God Gets The Last Word)



Moses and Israel in the Desert

What happened to Moses after his unlikely rescue from death by Pharaoh's own daughter? "At this time Moses was born and he was beautiful before God. For three months he was brought up in his father's house; and when he was abandoned, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. So Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in his words and deeds" (Acts 7:20-22). Moses would have been at a loss for his ultimate task of confronting Pharaoh, organizing hundreds of thousands of slaves, and going before the Israelite community as its leader. It took forty years in Egypt to give Moses this part of his training.

During that period, he was acutely aware that he was really an Israelite and not an Egyptian. He identified with the oppressed rather than their oppressors. He must have dreamed about rescuing them. He must have envisioned himself as the champion of his people — rallied to and followed by them. So the day came when he thought it was time to act. This is what he did:

One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk. He looked this way and that and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. When he went out the next day, he saw two Hebrews fighting; and he said to the one who was in the wrong, "Why do you strike your fellow Hebrew?" He answered, "Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "Surely the thing is known." When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses.

But Moses fled from Pharaoh. He settled in the land of Midian, and sat down by a well. The priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. But some shepherds came and drove them away. Moses got up and came to their defense and watered their flock. When they returned to their father Reuel, he said, "How is it that you have come back so soon today?" They said, "An Egyptian helped us against the shepherds; he even drew water for us and watered the flock." He said to his daughters, "Where is he? Why did you leave the man? Invite him to break bread." Moses agreed to stay with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah in marriage. She bore a son, and he named him Gershom; for he said, "I have been an alien residing in a foreign land" (Exodus 2:11-22).

Is it mere speculation that Moses had dreamed of leading Israel? Is it presumptuous to see a vision of him as an arrogant man ready to lead God's people before God called him to the task? Hardly. This is from a speech by an early Christian evangelist named Stephen and recorded by the historian Luke:

When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his relatives, the Israelites. When he saw one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. He supposed that his kinsfolk

would understand that God through him was rescuing them, but they did not understand (Acts 7:23-25).

Moses was presumptuous. He was running ahead of Yahweh's plan. He "supposed" the Israelites would recognize him as God's instrument of deliverance. But God hadn't called him to that task yet. How crestfallen Moses must have felt in Midian. He had failed to rescue his people. And he had forever taken himself out of the deliverance picture. If the Israelites were to leave Egypt, someone else would have to lead them. But God still had something in mind.

Moses needed a second forty years of training before he could lead an exodus of Israelites. Yahweh had to teach him humility, patience and simplicity. The Israelites would have been overwhelmed in the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula except for the guidance of someone who knew how to deal with that forbidding territory. When would the adopted child of Pharaoh's daughter learn that? Would a prince adopt the life of a nomadic shepherd?

God didn't tell Moses to kill that Egyptian taskmaster. God didn't drive him into the desert. Yet God *did* take all the experiences of his life (e.g., parentage, education, Midian, etc.) and put them to use for His purposes on His timetable. The discipline of eighty years was necessary background to the ministry of forty. Moses needed more molding. He needed some things pruned away. He needed to trust less in himself and more in God.

The Price of Maturity

What Moses had to learn is what you and I must learn too. There is a price to be paid for anything that is worthwhile. Isn't that one of the hardest lessons for today's parents to teach their children? The value of things? Somehow we must come to understand there is a cost for everything we want.

"I want to be an attorney!" says a high school student. But when he finds out that means not only finishing high school but four years of college and three or four more of law school, it isn't nearly so attractive. "I want to play football!" says another. But when he learns about off-season conditioning, practices that take away his after-school hours, and learning plays, he decides it isn't for him after all. "We want a big house

filled with nice furniture!" say the newlyweds. They borrow, charge and pile up a mountain of debt. Then the payments come due — and they find they've had an appetite for steak but only a macaroni-and-cheese income.

"I want to be a disciple of Christ!" says someone. Then you need to understand that the grace that cost God His Son cannot be cheap for you to receive. In one sense, salvation costs you nothing; in another, it costs you everything. It is God's work to provide and He has done that at the cross; in receiving it, however, we pledge unreserved devotion to Him.

So what will it cost you? I don't know all the specifics, of course, but I can assure you there will be some wilderness time. You will need some pruning and molding. You will need to learn to trust God more than yourself. You will need to grow through the Christ-as-happiness-formula stage of life to the Christ-as-companion-in-struggle understanding of discipleship. This type of discipleship typically takes you into the wilderness.

In the barren wastes of the wilderness, we are confronted with the grim and harsh realities of our own weaknesses and failings. We come to know ourselves as never before. For many Christians, the wilderness is a place of isolation in which we have the opportunity to identify and confront the hidden sins and fears that threaten to destroy us as people and prevent us from reaching our journey's end.

The wilderness can thus be a place of purification, somewhere we can examine ourselves, face up to our failings and put things right. It is a place of exile, not a permanent home. It is not where we are meant to be. Yet our wanderings in that place of exile can prepare us for that homecoming, not least in that it gives us a new awareness of how much we long to return home.

Peter used the metaphor of Christians as pilgrims and exiles and wrote this:

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is

the Spirit of God, is resting on you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker. Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name (I Peter 4:12-16).

Conclusion

I wonder how many experiences will have the quality of wilderness in our spiritual lives when we get to heaven? We'll look back and realize how necessary some time of strain, weakness and dragging up the rear was to our spiritual survival. A wilderness time got us ready to endure or taught us the true priorities of living.

Do you think Moses understood the meaning of the first two-thirds of his life while he was living them? Not on your life! He has to have been confused. He has to have doubted whether God was even aware of him, much less involved in what was going on. Why keep running laps when what he wanted was to play ball? Why tend sheep in the Sinai when what he wanted was to lead an exodus from Egypt? It became clear later, many years later.

By being forced to rely on [the Lord's] grace more fully, we are being prepared for service to Him (cf. II Corinthians 12:7-10). In making this spiritual journey, we are not only living out Moses' experience but Christ's as well. Is this not what the writer of Hebrews had in mind? **"Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered" (Hebrews 5:8)**. We cannot say that Christ "learned" in the same sense as we do. Nevertheless, there is a tie that binds us to Christ our brother. We, too, learn obedience from what we suffer. The Lord drives us into our desert to conform us to the likeness of His son: **"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (II Corinthians 3:18)**.

Moses had a garbled resume. He experienced loss of life direction and even criminal deeds. What a testimony to the sovereignty of God that some of the most unlikely of life-events wind up being credentials! Who knows but that your heaviest burden today or most embarrassing failure from the past will become the very thing that equips you for some task God will

need done? Who knows but that your wilderness experience of the moment is precisely what you need to make home seem more desirable, more real? I can guarantee you that God has the power to make any ordeal endured in faith into a victory. **The Power Of God Gets The Last Word.**

Don't give up. Try not to be too frustrated that you can't see where things are going. Your line of sight on everything happening now will be clearer at the end. Like Moses, you will discover there was no wasted effort, no needless lesson learned and no forgetfulness on the part of your God. There *is* a purpose to every wilderness.