



WILDERNESS

FINDING GODS WILL IN THE DESOLATE

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A COMMUNITY GROUP STUDY MADE, WRITTEN
AND
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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1 PROPELLING PRESENCE

CHAPTER 2 CAPTURING BURN

CHAPTER 3 TWO WILDERNESSES

CHAPTER 4 OVER THE DESOLATE

CONCLUSION

WILDERNESS

INTRODUCTION

WILL-DERNESS : *Desert; desolate, bewildering situation*

Let's face it , the WILLDERNESS is a difficult place to be. If we are honest with ourselves, times of WILLDERNESS are the least to be desired. In the WILLDERNESS, we are often confronted by the greatest heartaches, losses and challenges of our lives. Yet, countering these desolate and bewildering situations is a river of provision, growth and change that is provided only by God's grace. The apprehension we most often feel in the WILLDERNESS is distance and confusion, due to our present circumstances. "Why would a loving God allow and/or lead me into times like these?" Instead of fearing the WILLDERNESS, what if these desert places should be welcomed? What if they are times where we find God's WILL among the desolate?

The scriptures are filled with WILLDERNESS accounts and encounters for those who are called out by God. Joseph, Moses, Israel and Jesus all found themselves amidst times of the WILLDERNESS. In each of these accounts we see that not all WILLDERNESS moments are self made, but sometimes brought on by circumstances outside of our control. One thing is made clear, the WILLDERNESS will happen. The desolate will be inhabited. However, it is only the WILL of God that makes a way when there seems to be no way.

Through the coming weeks we will journey our way through the Desolate. By examining the lives of some of the Patriarchs, Israel and then Jesus, we will see how these WILLDERNESS times align us with God's will. In each encounter, we will find ourselves in ever good company and see ways in which God desires to meet us with His WILL.

The common cry of those in the WILLDERNESS is, "Why?" But what if "Why?" is not the proper response? Perhaps what we will come to see is that our "Why?" should transition into "What?"

Our hope for this series is that our perspective of the WILLDERNESS will be forever changed. Our hope is that we will become further surrendered to what God might accomplish amidst our desolate places. Ultimately, it is our hope that we will shift our posture from resistance to the WILLDERNESS to one of a willing embrace. Just maybe when facing the WILLDERNESS, we will find ourselves asking "What?" instead of "Why?" What is your WILLDERNESS, Lord?

WILDERNESS

FINDING GODS WILL IN THE DESOLATE

CHAPTER 1

PROPELLING PRESENCE

WILDERNESS

CHAPTER 1

PROPELLING PRESENCE

PASSAGE

Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. 3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. 4 But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him. 5 Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. 6 He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed: 7 Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf." 8 His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. GENESIS 37: 2–8 (ESV)

18 They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. 19 They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. 20 Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams." 21 But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." 22 And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him"—that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father. 23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. 24 And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it. 25 Then they sat down to eat. And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. 26 Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? 27 Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers listened to him. 28 Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him

out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt. **GENESIS 37:18–28 (ESV)**

36 Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard. **GENESIS 37:36 (ESV)**

2 The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. 3 His master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands.

GENESIS 39:2–3 (ESV)

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. 7 And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." 8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. 9 He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" 10 And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her.

GENESIS 39:6–10 (ESV)

11 But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, 12 she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house. **GENESIS 39:11–12 (ESV)**

19 As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, "This is the way your servant treated me," his anger was kindled. 20 And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. 21 But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. 22 And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. 23 The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the Lord was with him. **And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed. GENESIS 39:19–23 (ESV)**

¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." ¹⁶ So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died: ¹⁷ 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you." ' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸ His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? ²⁰ As for you, **you meant evil against me, but God meant**

it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. GENESIS 50:15–20 (ESV)

PRESUMED PROJECTION

Most have a good handle on how we think life should go. Whether it is the hope of a great job with stellar benefits, a beautiful spouse and family, or even a perceived calling that God has laid before you, most of our PRESUMED PROJECTIONS look far different from what often transpires.

Throughout scripture, one of the most identifiable stories of a WILLDERNESS journey is the life of the patriarch Joseph. Joseph is the son of Jacob. Jacob has his own tattered and sin filled past as being a deceiver to his family. Yet, God reclaims his life and gives him a new name, (Israel). From Israel will the promise to Abraham be continued and moved forward. Israel marries Leah and Rachel and between these two sisters has 12 sons and one daughter. One of these sons is highly favored by Israel. His name is Joseph. In the story, we see that the father openly displays his favoritism for Joseph by giving gifts in front of the other siblings. One in particular is that of a coat of many colors. Joseph carries no responsibilities in working the field unlike his other brothers and is perceived as soft/spoiled in their eyes. If all this isn't bad enough, Joseph is a dreamer. Joseph is not just a day dreamer, but he actually receives visions from the Most High God. If you have siblings, I am sure you can resonate with this story.

One day, Joseph has a dream and this dream essentially projects his brothers as bowing down before him. Talk about provocative. This sends his brothers into a spiral of hate. Shortly after the dream, Joseph is sent by his father into the fields to check on his brothers. Filled with rage, they decide to throw Joseph into a pit. Although seen as a short term lesson issued by his brother Ruben, the others get the idea to sell Joseph as a slave to a group of Midianite

traders. It is an unimaginable scenario as we wrestle with the thought of family selling family into slavery, let alone brothers. Yet here is Joseph, a dreamer with a God given vision, attached to a PRESUMED PROJECTION. A PRESUMED PROJECTION that neither he, nor the reader, would ever have guessed entails being sold into slavery.

Clearly portrayed in this story is the reality that God's PROPELLING PRESENCE in our lives often results in differing PRESUMED PROJECTIONS. We can hold so tightly to our PRESUMED PROJECTIONS that we are rattled when adversity arises, harm befalls and the journey leads us into times of WILLDERNESS. In Joseph's case, he had a vision of the future, but certainly slavery was a least likely event on his PRESUMED PROJECTION of its execution. Although God allowed Joseph to share this dream in a way that would upset his brothers and ultimately bring about this undesirable event in his life, God's PROPELLING PRESENCE was fully active in the face of this desolate event.

As with Joseph, we may have dreams of what can be, and often they are God given. Yet our PROJECTIONS of the journey involve a high level of PRESUMED mountain tops, and that is where we begin to wrestle when we find ourselves in the desolate. Whether we find the WILLDERNESS through self infliction, by the hands of another, or causes outside of our control, we can be assured that God's PROPELLING PRESENCE is there working in the desolate. His WILL is still found in the WILLDERNESS.

We may have a PRESUMED PROJECTION of cruising on easy street into that dream beyond, yet when all hell breaks loose we can be assured that the dream is not lost in the WILLDERNESS. If anything, when we are turned towards God, these times of challenge will only deepen our sense of God's ultimate will. In the desolate, we can find even the worst of the WILLDERNESS being met by God's move of redemption. In the midst of what may seem like hell on earth, there is still a stream of hope in the WILLDERNESS. Perhaps it is these times of

WILLDERNESS that God allows to draw our focus back to His PROPELLING PRESENCE. What are your PRESUMED PROJECTIONS for life? Are you in the WILLDERNESS now?

REFLECTION

How have your PRESUMED PROJECTIONS of life brought despair during times of the WILLDERNESS?

During the WILLDERNESS do you find yourself doubting who God is and what His ultimate will may be for you? Do you allow the desolate to convince you that He is not there?

What have some of these times of WILLDERNESS looked like in the past? If you are in a WILLDERNESS currently, are you having a hard time seeing God's PROPELLING PRESENCE? *(If in group share this experience. Share with honesty. Stop right now and pray for one another.)*

Looking back to past WILLDERNESS experiences, how have you seen God use them to bring about redemption, hope and love?

ACCOMPANIED

One of the most terrifying thoughts about heading into any WILLDERNESS is being alone in a foreign place. You may be the adventurous type and the word WILLDERNESS triggers your mind towards great hiking adventures, campouts or refreshing times. However, these WILLDERNESS journeys often resemble quite the opposite. They are places filled with desolation. Whether a wrestle with depression, a hospital room where you are met with an unexpected illness or procedure, a death of a loved one, the loss of a job or home, a child racing towards destruction, a marriage falling apart, an experience of rejection or abuse, all of these are quite the contrast of a great time of adventure. These are times when we often sense little PROPELLING PRESENCE and feel unACCOMPANIED for the journey.

Joseph has found himself sold to an influential and wealthy master in the land of Egypt. To a man by the name of Potiphar, a prison owner and overseer, Joseph has found himself in great favor. Far from his home and going through experiences like he has never encountered, it is not Joseph's strength, charisma or aptitude as a good slave that brings the favor of Potiphar. Simply explained in the passage, it is because God was with him. God ACCOMPANIED Joseph during this time of WILLDERNESS, and it is the very PROPELLING PRESENCE of God that makes way for Joseph when there would seem to be none. ACCOMPANIED by God, Joseph served his master's house in a glorifying way. All that he did succeeded and garnered the attention of those around him. Joseph obviously was leaning into

trusting God's PROPELLING PRESENCE in this time and resting in Him during the WILLDERNESS.

Right when we sense things are finally going to move towards Joseph's ultimate call and dream, and there seems to be a break in the desolate, the journey takes a deeper turn into the woods. Potiphar's wife takes notice of Joseph, but not for his great work ethic or that God was with him. She sees a great looking cabana boy and decides nothing should be withheld from her desire, even him. So she attempts to persuade Joseph to sleep with her. Joseph, time and time again, makes moves to trust God by refusing to sin against Him and Potiphar. Feeling a sense of undeserved rejection, Potiphar's wife sets it in her heart to punish Joseph. During her final attempt to persuade him, she tears Joseph's garment as he flees and cries rape. Talk about bad luck.

As we can imagine, Potiphar is enraged and moves in favor of his wife. Now cast into prison, it seems Joseph is at rock bottom yet again. One can only imagine the wrestle and thoughts swirling about in Joseph's mind. Nevertheless, we see this common theme arise once more, God was with him. No matter the depths of the WILLDERNESS, the pits of slavery and times of desolation, Joseph was ACCOMPANIED by the PROPELLING PRESENCE of God. Interestingly enough, Joseph finds favor with the keeper of the prison and is put in charge of all the prisoners. Here is a nugget for you that makes this even more interesting. The keeper of the prison and the master of the house are the same person; Potiphar. Cue the astonished music.

During our times in the WILLDERNESS, like Joseph, we can rest assured that we are not alone. When we tread through those desolate places way beyond our experience and comfort, we are ACCOMPANIED by the PROPELLING PRESENCE of God. Our response should be to move in ways that are honorable and glorifying to Him as we trust in His WILL being worked out around us. We have no insight into the impact Joseph was in Potiphar's life. Yet, I would

dare say, through being ACCOMPANIED by God and Joseph's faithfulness to trust, there was much revealed in the hearts of many.

Do you feel alone in your WILLDERNESS? Be assured that God has not forsaken you in these darkest hours, but is there ACCOMPANYING you with his PROPELLING PRESENCE. Rest in His ACCOMPANIED love and poured out grace.

REFLECTION

Where have been the places you have felt most alone? What convinced you that you were so?

Seeing it was not in how hard Joseph worked to provide during this time but in how God's PROPELLING PRESENCE ACCOMPANIED him, how are you encouraged to trust in the LORD?

How are you drawn to trust in God's ACCOMPANYING presence? Does it help you to dispel those feelings of fear and loneliness?

MEANT FOR GOOD

Fast forward now toward the end of Joseph's life. Joseph has moved from prison keep, all the way to second in command of Egypt. Remember, all of this brought about solely by the PROPELLING PRESENCE of God. One of Pharaoh's dreams leads to a prisoner's (*Joseph*) God given interpretation, which leads to God given wisdom for efforts in how to prepare for the dream's answer. This then leads to Joseph becoming the man entrusted to oversee these preparation efforts. The dream was a future famine that would inflict Egypt, along with the surrounding lands. God's given answer to Joseph was to build storehouses and begin to collect resources in preparation. Now at the right hand of Pharaoh, we can almost believe Joseph seems to be out of the WILLDERNESS. Yet, though his life seems to be the lap of luxury, much transpires bringing difficulty and pain.

As forecasted, famine strikes the land and people from all surrounding regions. Word gets out that Egypt has provisions. Pause right here and think on this. Through all of Joseph's WILLDERNESS experiences, all the bad things that happened to him, God's PROPELLING PRESENCE used these events to bring about provision in a time of extreme need. It would seem God MEANT FOR GOOD what was intended for evil. Low and behold, one day during the sale of goods, Joseph sees someone he recognizes; his brothers. They have been stricken by the famine and are in great need. Joseph orchestrates a series of encounters with his brothers and learns that Israel has had another son. Like Joseph, Israel loves this son. So, Joseph requests the brothers bring him to Egypt or else there will be no more trading of goods. They eventually give in and bring the son.

As the story unfolds, Joseph reveals himself to his brothers and the whole family ends up reconciled together. They then move into Egypt under Joseph's care. As the years pass and Israel begins to

make his earthly exit, the brothers begin to worry that Joseph may still harbor bitterness towards them. Upon Israel's death, the brothers fear for their lives and throw themselves at Joseph's mercy. To their surprise Joseph is anything but bitter about it. Through his WILLDERNESS journey, while having the right to blame everyone around him and most certainly his brothers for his time in the desolate, Joseph had become ever shaped by and familiar with God's PROPELLING PRESENCE and WILL. Joseph's response to his brothers plea was not one of scolding, a good talking to or even a cross word. He simply stated, "As for you, **you meant evil against me, but God MEANT IT FOR GOOD**, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." (Genesis 50:19-20)

When times of WILLDERNESS happen in our lives, we have different ways we can respond. We can choose to allow these times to bury us with bitterness, rage and anger, which leads us to curse God and others around us. Or, we can choose to allow ourselves to be moved by God's PROPELLING PRESENCE. Like Joseph, we can choose to allow these times to drive us closer to God's ultimate will and see that even in the midst of hardship, hurt and peril, whatever was meant for evil against us God turns and has MEANT FOR GOOD. In similar fashion to the words of Job, "Though He slay me I will trust Him." We can choose to move away from asking "Why?", to ultimately seeing God's what.

In Joseph we can clearly see that, although God is not the causer of Evil, it is not outside of His control. And it is His objective to weave a thread of redemption in the midst of the desolate as a way to align our lives with His will and ultimately bring about what He alone has MEANT FOR GOOD. During Joseph's time in the WILLDERNESS, we see God's care for Israel, as Joseph's journey was the key to preserving Abraham's promise. Could the WILLDERNESS times of your life be the very places God is making way in other's lives? Could

you be the thread of redemption He has MEANT FOR GOOD and weaved into those around you?

REFLECTION

What are some WILLDERNESS times in the past or currently where it is hard to see what God has MEANT FOR GOOD?

How does seeing these WILLDERNESS times as God turning towards his ultimate plan of redemption help you to embrace His PROPELLING PRESENCE?

Are you aware of the people around you and how your response to the WILLDERNESS may weave threads of redemption in their lives?

How are you drawn to trust in God's ACCOMPANYING presence?
Does it help you to dispel those feelings of fear and aloneness?

APPLICATION

-REFLECT: Are you in a current place in which you would have never PROJECTED to be? What are some of the ways you have held PRESUMED PROJECTIONS of your life? In Joseph's life, how do you think he saw the dreams God had given playing out?

-READ: Matthew 6:5-13. *In the prayer Jesus teaches his disciples, what can you discern on how we should approach our projections?*

-WRITE: Journal the things you feel like God has given you dreams of. *Now write down how you think they should come about. After that, answer this, will you surrender these things to the One who gave them?*

-PRAY: *Lord, so often we try to take your dreams for us and attempt to make them our reality. God, help us to be moved by your Propelling Presence in our lives. Lord, help us to relinquish our motives to your WILL.*

WILDERNESS

FINDING GODS WILL IN THE DESOLATE

CHAPTER 2

CAPTURING BURN

WILDERNESS

CHAPTER 2

CAPTURING BURN

PASSAGE

11 One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. 12 He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. 13 When he went out the next day, behold, two Hebrews were struggling together. And he said to the man in the wrong, "Why do you strike your companion?" 14 He answered, "Who made you a prince and a 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." 15 When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian.

EXODUS 2:11–15 (ESV)

23 During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. 24 And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. 25 God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.

EXODUS 2: 23–25 (ESV)

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. 3 And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." 4 When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5 Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

WILDERNESS

7 Then the Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. **EXODUS 3:1-7 (ESV)**
13 Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I am has sent me to you.' " 15 God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

EXODUS 3:13-15 (ESV)

1 Then Moses answered, "But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, 'The Lord did not appear to you.' " 2 The Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A staff." 3 And he said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses ran from it. 4 But the Lord said to Moses, "Put out your hand and catch it by the tail"—so he put out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand—
5 "that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you."
6 Again, the Lord said to him, "Put your hand inside your cloak." And he put his hand inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. 7 Then God said, "Put your hand back inside your cloak." So he put his hand back inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh.

EXODUS 4:1-7 (ESV)

10 But Moses said to the Lord, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue." 11 Then the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? 12 Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak."
13 But he said, "Oh, my Lord, please send someone else." 14 Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses and he said, "Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. 15 You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do.

EXODUS 4:10-15 (ESV)

TURNED TO SMOLDER

Have you ever had a burning passion for something or someone? So much so that you eventually took the risk and put it all on the line only to find out you showed your hand too soon? It is a humbling situation to say the least. In many ways it is miscalculations such as these which often lead you towards a WILLDERNESS experience. Maybe you have for some time been pressing forward in relationship with Jesus. As you have grown you have developed some serious passions about things. It is clear there is a righteous stirring within you to see something happen, so you take a step out of that burn. All seems well until you realize you way overestimated and got ahead of yourself and perhaps even more so God. You think to yourself, "Wow, what a screw up". Or perhaps, "God, I thought you had my back!" Sound familiar?

By way of Joseph, God lead Israel and his family into Egypt. There now some 400 years later, what once was a family in a distant land has now turned into a large and numerous people. So much so, scripture says, a Pharaoh arises that knew not Joseph, and the people found no favor in his eyes. In fact he feared them and so set out to squash them by means of slavery and infanticide. Talk about a WILLDERNESS period. The people begin to groan and cry out, and the Lord remembers His promise, His thread of Redemption. Enter a baby named Moses.

Moses is born to the house of Levi during the time of this state instituted infanticide. God makes way to preserve his life, and it lands Moses in the house of the Pharaoh. Pause here. One of the babies you have sought to kill makes its way into your home and becomes a part of your family; pretty amazing circumstances to say the least. Moses is raised as a son of Pharaoh but is influenced throughout his life by his birth mother, as she served Pharaoh's wife by caring for Moses. Moses is aware of his heritage and all that he truly is, which is not Egyptian. Then one day something ignites a CAPTURING BURN in Moses' heart. Upon seeing an Israelite, one of his own people, beaten by a soldier, compassion overtakes him, and he kills the soldier. Word gets out. Pharaoh is hot, and Moses goes on the run.

Fleeing to Midian, Moses meets a Priest of Midian (Jethro), marries his daughter and settles down with the family. There he keeps the flocks in the WILLDERNESS. It seems as though what began as a CAPTURING BURN in Moses' heart has now TURNED TO SMOLDER. Surely Moses feels a deep sense of loss. He had attempted to act on behalf of his burning passion for his people but had seemingly lost everything in the process. It appeared he had shown his hand too quickly.

Like us, little did Moses know at this point in his life God would call out to this CAPTURING BURN TURNED TO SMOLDER. It is in this very WILLDERNESS that this CAPTURING BURN for a people would become better defined by revelation of who God is. Quite possibly it is the times of WILLDERNESS in

our lives that accompany what seems to be failure, from which God begins to ever solidify our understanding of who He truly is. Like Moses, we may have over played our hand early but God has made provision for us in the WILLDERNESS. Our flame may have TURNED TO SMOLDER, but when met by His presence in the WILLDERNESS, it will become a CAPTURING BURN ever fueling our conviction to trust and understand God's will.

REFLECTION

What are some steps towards a CAPTURING BURN that have been met with unforeseen outcomes? Have you had places of great passion TURN TO SMOLDER?

If we follow Moses' lead, in times of the WILLDERNESS, how should we handle perceived failures?

What are your feelings now on those places of once great burn
TURNED TO SMOLDER? Are you allowing them to still churn
within you? Or are you dismissing them from being of use?

LUMINOUS ARREST

There is an old saying that goes, "light shines the brightest in darkness". For many, the WILLDERNESS can be a dark and desolate place. These WILLDERNESS journeys often lead us to question and wonder about God's goodness and provision. We wander these days carrying out those menial tasks, and simply making it through, wondering if there is any purpose to it all. But what if it is during these times that God desires to break into the darkness with a greater revelation of who He is?

Moses has spent around 40 years in the land of Midian. He has begun a family with a daughter (*Zipporah*) of the priest of Midian (*Jethro*) and has found himself becoming a member in the family business.. Apparently, it is yet another normal day for Moses with the flocks in the WILLDERNESS of Midian. Moses has grown accustomed to where he is in life, with the WILLDERNESS he exists in and appears to have lost a sense of the CAPTURING BURN that resulted in his current situation. Certainly, there is much life that has happened between the then and this moment, but it is all about to culminate with one encounter.

There in the WILLDERNESS, Moses takes notice of a "burning bush". Yet this bush has a burn like none seen before. It is ablaze yet the bush is not consumed and burned up. Moses is caught in a

LUMINOUS ARREST. Drawn in closer, he moves to examine. Apparently in 40 years of being in the WILLDERNESS this was something shining bright beyond his experience. On his approach, Moses is met with a voice calling out from the bush, "Moses, Moses!" Moses' first response is not to flee the moment but to simply respond, "Here I am!" It is clear this LUMINOUS ARREST is met with a calling out to a SMOLDERING heart of a once CAPTURING BURN.

Caught in a LUMINOUS ARREST, Moses hears from the God of Israel, his God. It is through this WILLDERNESS time that Moses not only comes to hear a calling out from the MOST HIGH, but to find greater understanding of who God is and a fuller understanding of the CAPTURING BURN that had once blossomed inside of him. It is in this moment and encounter that Moses' life will be ever more aligned with God's ultimate calling on his life. His WILLDERNESS journey has not been all for not. In fact, God has allowed it as a means to strip away all PRESUMED PROJECTIONS and move him towards God's PROJECTING PRESENCE.

This encounter with YHWY is one that reignites the fire that has TURNED TO SMOLDER within Moses for his people. It is a resignation that will move him towards a CAPTURING BURN that is controlled and defined by the very ACCOMPANIED presence of God. Perhaps in your WILLDERNESS there is a flame that has been TURNED TO SMOLDER. It is highly possible that this desolate dark time is one from which God will break into with a LUMINOUS ARREST. One thing is for certain, if we care to remain faithful and vigilant we will encounter God's ever burning presence in the WILLDERNESS. If we have eyes to see and ears to hear, He will revive us with His CAPTURING BURN. Are you looking for the fire that burns with His CAPTURING BURN? His LUMINOUS ARREST is piercing through the darkness. Can you see it?

REFLECTION

In your dark and desolate WILLDERNESS, have there been times when God showed up with a LUMINOUS ARREST? Reflect and share them.

When you are in the WILLDERNESS are you so carried away with the desolate that you have missed when God was breaking through?

What is the SMOLDER in your life that quite possibly God is reigniting with His CAPTURING BURN, with a LUMINOUS ARREST moment?
What have you given up hope on?

DEFINING FIRE

40 years is a long time to wait in a WILLDERNESS. Yet, we can see the hand of God all over Moses' life through provision of a family, shelter, work and protection in the midst of this time. When we are in WILLDERNESS moments, it is easy to pass over these real and tangible

WILLDERNESS

demonstrations of God's presence. Most certainly Moses had plenty of questions to wrestle with. And most assuredly some of these were likely "Why?" questions. However, as with time, the pressing nature these questions are often met with seems to be silence. When there seems to be a long period of silence it often leaves us to let go of attempting to DEFINE all the "Why's?" and opens us to seeing beyond the moment. The desolate has a way of breaking our attempted definition of what we think our life should be.

During this burning bush moment, Moses is met with the CAPTURING BURN of God's presence. It is in this moment that God uses this as a DEFINING FIRE for Moses' life. The DEFINING FIRE is not one to show Moses who he is. In reality, Moses was at a place in his life where the WILLDERNESS had made him come to grips with his mortality and inability to carry out the Burn he had once felt back in Egypt. The DEFINING FIRE was a moment where God revealed Who He was to Moses. *"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."* (Exodus 3:6)

Moses receives this, and conversation moves on. God begins to reveal that the CAPTURING BURN for his people was God placed, and it was now that God had decided to move in favor of his desired rescue. Moses was to be the one God would use to bring them out of Egypt. Beaten down by his past experience, and the WILLDERNESS journey over the last years, Moses expresses some doubts in his response. Who will I say sent me, and how will I be able to do this?

You see, it is in this DEFINING FIRE that Moses will find out who God is. In response to the question "Who?", *"14 God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.' And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel: 'I am has sent me to you.' " 15 God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.'"* (EXODUS 3:13-15) Here in the WILLDERNESS Moses is met by the very DEFINING name of who God is, "I AM". God was directly

DEFINING himself for Moses to see. He was acquainting Himself with His servant and bringing ever greater clarity to this CAPTURING BURN within Moses' life.

Moving to the "How?" question, we see here that the WILLDERNESS has helped Moses clearly understand his limitations and mortality. This CAPTURING BURN within him is far greater than what he could ever pull off. So God answers Moses in this way, "So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go. 21 And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, 22 but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians." (EXODUS 3:20-22) The "I AM" will be the one "WHO WILL" do all that is required. Moses' burn will be used to go forth and be God's ambassador, but it will be God, in His strength, power and might, who brings it all to pass.

The WILLDERNESS, when allowed, is the place all our DEFINITIONS of ourselves and abilities are stripped away. It is a time when we become ever vulnerable to receiving God's DEFINING FIRE. Like Moses, the WILLDERNESS can prepare us to fully see Who God really is. Perhaps it is the place where His CAPTURING BURN is better understood because we find a better understanding of the One who has given it. Walking through the desolate is a difficult place to be, yet it is most often the place where His DEFINING FIRE can fully break into our greater moment of need.

In the WILLDERNESS, we not only come to see that God is ever still present, but come to further know Him and how He desires to be known. "Looking beyond the trees to see the forest", so to speak. When we come to see Who God further is, He begins to redefine who we thought we were. All of Moses' definitions of himself were burned away in light of ultimately who God was. For many of us, our darkest

days have been a means to further tell us who we are based on rejection and circumstance. However, what we see with Moses is that God desires these times to provide an ever Defining view of Who He is. It was in this WILLDERNESS that Moses became ever more defined because of God's DEFINING FIRE revealing who He was to Moses. How will God's DEFINING FIRE shape and mold you in your WILLDERNESS?

REFLECTION

How have your times of WILLDERNESS DEFINED you?

What are some of the ways God has made Himself better known during your times of WILLDERNESS?

Have times of WILLDERNESS brought you face to face with your great need? How have you been reassured by God's DEFINING FIRE that He is the one who will see you through?

APPLICATION

-REFLECT: *How has the CAPTURING BURN of God drawn you into His presence in the midst of the WILLDERNESS? Are there places that once burned white hot with zeal that have TURNED TO SMOLDER? How is God using His DEFINING FIRE to change your life and align with His will?*

-READ: Acts 9. How did the Apostle Paul meet the Capturing Burn?

-WRITE: *Journal the places that God has placed in you that you once felt so much passion for but have since subsided. Maybe these places will be better defined by your WILLDERNESS experiences. What is God speaking to you about them currently?*

-PRAY: *Lord, there are many places that you have built a Holy passion, a righteous discontent for things in our lives. Would you show us how we must release them to your Capturing Burn? God, use the Wilderness to draw us closer to your will, and help us to embrace your DEFINING FIRE.*

WILDERNESS

FINDING GODS WILL IN THE DESOLATE

CHAPTER 3

TWO WILDERNESSES

WILDERNESS

CHAPTER 3

TWO WILDERNESSES

PASSAGE

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, **"Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt."** 18But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle. 19Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here." 20And they moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness. 21And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. 22The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.

EXODUS 13:17–22 (ESV)

22 Then Moses made Israel set out from the Red Sea, and they **went into the wilderness of Shur**. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. 23 When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; therefore it was named Marah. 24 And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" 25 And he cried to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. EXODUS 15:22–25 (ESV)

25 At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land. 26 And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the people of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh. They brought back word to them and to all

the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. 27 And they told him, "We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. 28 However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. 29 The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan."

30 But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it." 31 Then the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are." 32 So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, "The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. 33 And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them." NUMBERS 13:25-33 (ESV)

14 Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. 2 And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! 3 Why is the Lord bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?" 4 And they said to one another, "Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt." NUMBERS 14:1-4 (ESV)

20 Then the Lord said, "I have pardoned, according to your word. 21 But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord, 22 none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, 23 shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those who despised me shall see it. 24 But my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit and has followed me fully, I will bring into the land into which he went, and his descendants shall possess it. 25 Now, since the

Amalekites and the Canaanites dwell in the valleys, turn tomorrow and set out for the wilderness by the way to the Red Sea.” NUMBERS 14:20–25 (ESV)

CONFORMANCE

In our lives, there seem to be different types of WILLDERNESS experiences. These experiences can be simply examined within TWO WILLDERNESSES. First, you have the WILLDERNESS of CONFORMANCE. Second, the WILLDERNESS of DEFIANCE. Either of the two bring hardship and struggle, but there is a key difference between them. CONFORMANCE is a WILLDERNESS moment that you have had little to do with. In this WILLDERNESS experience we embark on a journey either God lead or allowed. It is something we were not anticipating for our lives, but happens nonetheless. Often it is in the midst of these moments that we wrestle with God the hardest and begin to wonder about His proclaimed goodness, mercy and grace. It is a WILLDERNESS that can challenge us to define God by our circumstances. Nevertheless, God is using these times to bring CONFORMANCE to our lives and shape us with His will.

Israel has found themselves outside the oppression and slavery of Egypt. Delivered by the very powerful and mighty hand of God, as demonstrated in the 10 plagues, the people are in a period of change. Exodus records for us how God will prepare them for the next leg of their journey. He leads them into the Wilderness towards the Red Sea. Why would He do this? Again scripture records, *“Lest the people*

change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt.” (Exodus 13:17) This WILLDERNESS was a means of CONFORMANCE. A part of God’s ultimate purpose was something far beyond what the people could ever imagine. This WILLDERNESS would be used to prepare them for even greater moments of His provision and plan.

In like manner, God later leads the people into the WILLDERNESS again after they cross the Red Sea. Three days in, Scripture says, and the “People grumbled.” It is easy to pile on the Israelites here. I mean they have just witnessed first hand two huge moves of God on their behalf. But what we are challenged by is when the WILLDERNESS happens to you, the circumstance can make you question even the biggest moments of God’s demonstrated power no matter its relative distance in the past.

Either time, we are assured that God has not abandoned the people. We are assured of a purpose for the WILLDERNESS. Preparation, a deepening of God’s WILL for their lives, community and kingdom are all a part of a time spent in the desolate. It is really a time of CONFORMANCE to the very character of God. As slaves, their identity was CONFORMED to the ways of EGYPT, and in the WILLDERNESS, God would use the desolate to meet them and CONFORM THEM with His presence. It is here they would be stripped of all their previous identities and become CONFORMED into their IDENTITY as God’s chosen people.

CONFORMANCE is a process which involves the WILLDERNESS. Whether you have or are currently experiencing moments of the WILLDERNESS where your circumstances are out of your control, it is quite possibly a place where God is going to shape your life and align it with His WILL in the desolate. All of your past clutches to previous identities that will be stripped away, and a new identity in Christ will await CONFORMITY. The ultimate challenge will be whether you will allow the circumstance to confine and isolate you in the desolate of the "Why's?" and "What if's?" Or, will you allow God to meet you with His freeing CONFORMANCE in the midst of the desolate?

REFLECTION

Have there been times where you have been thrust into the WILLDERNESS of CONFORMANCE? What were some of those experiences like?

During those times how did you move towards trying to see the "what" and not the "why"? How did coming through those WILLDERNESS journeys bring CONFORMANCE to God?

What are some ways you can help others walk through these WILLDERNESSES of CONFORMANCE?

DEFIANCE

If we aren't experiencing a WILLDERNESS of CONFORMANCE, we could quite possibly be in the midst of the second of the TWO WILLDERNESSES, DEFIANCE. DEFIANCE simply means, "the refusal to obey". Israel has come through the WILLDERNESS of the Red Sea. They have crossed the sea by, yet again, another miraculous move of God in the parting of the waters. Pharaoh and his guards have been swallowed up, and the people have made their way into the WILLDERNESS once more following God's lead. In this WILLDERNESS of Shur, the people are prepared for God's ultimate presence. They are given the commandments, called to establish the tabernacle for God's presence and walk through a multitude of instructions that God will use to CONFORM their identity to Him as His people. At the end of this period, the people are guided to the promised land in preparation for their entrance.

It is at this moment that we meet the people in their story at the book of Numbers. God directs Moses to send out 12 spies, one for each tribe, to scope out the land and report back. Upon their return, they confirmed how God had already described the land to Moses and the people, "a land flowing with milk and honey." Report goes, "it is exactly as God said, yet there are giants in the land and they are too much for us to match". The spies are already defeated by the

opposition they see in the face of God's ultimate dream for them. The people catch wind, and they begin to cry out, whine and grumble. "If only we were back in Egypt!". They refuse to take the land. They refuse to trust the Lord. Only Caleb and Joshua trust God's word and desire to act on His command, yet all the rest refuse. As a result, God sends them into the WILLDERNESS, only this time as a direct result of their DEFIANCE.

The WILLDERNESS of DEFIANCE is a difficult place to be. Its desolation carries an even greater sting, as it is so closely aligned with our actions. Whether we are walking with God, or haven't even begun, many times of WILLDERNESS are self inflicted. We ultimately desire to shape and conform our life to our own WILL. As a result, we become products of our own DEFIANCE and can often find ourselves in a place of hopeless desolation.

Like with Israel, the TWO WILLDERNESSES are really symbolic of the two WILLS, God's and ours. Whatever the WILLDERNESS experience is due to, we can choose to move towards CONFORMANCE and allow God's WILL to shape, mold and align us with His steadfast love and purpose, or we can continue to rebel for our own WILL and live in a state of DEFIANCE.

Interestingly enough, the people allowed the WILLDERNESS, more often than not, to press them into reminiscing on the past while diminishing their hope in the future. And not just a past of good times gone by, but one in which they were slaves. The WILLDERNESS of DEFIANCE will leave you longing for the past, even if it was one lived in chains. It manifests itself as a notion of complaint, a grumble against God, which evolves into a posture of DEFIANCE. Israel had the assurance that God would deliver them into the land, regardless the obstacle. Yet, as was developed their entire way through the WILLDERNESS up until this point, the people had taken a posture of DEFIANCE. Time and time again they had missed the very hand of God making way for them when there was none, and providing for

them in their time of need. They had allowed the circumstance of the DESOLATE to cloud the identity of their God.

As life happens, one thing is certain, we will face the WILLDERNESS regardless the TWO. Somewhere we will enter in a time of unexpected WILLDERNESS, and at other times we will yet again enter a WILLDERNESS of DEFIANCE. Some we could have avoided, and others come at us like a freight train with no warning. No matter the WILLDERNESS, the ultimate concern should be our response. Will we submit to an attitude of CONFORMANCE or one of DEFIANCE?

REFLECTION

Have there been times where you have clearly spent time in the WILLDERNESS of DEFIANCE? If so can you share what you learned?

Was it hard to own up to those areas of DEFIANCE that led you into the WILLDERNESS? Why?

In those times of DEFIANCE, did you find yourself unwilling to allow God to take your mess and use it for your good? Was it difficult to move towards CONFORMANCE?

PRESENT PROVISION

One final MAJOR point on these TWO WILLDERENESSES. While we have focused much on our response to these times of the WILLDERNESS, it is imperative that we do not miss the main motif that carries us through this time with the people of Israel.

No matter the WILLDERNESS, one purposed for CONFORMITY or one made by DEFIANCE, we can see clear evidence that God did not abandon His people. Along the way the people grumble and complain about resources, challenges and ultimately God's character, yet resiliently God continually meets them with His PRESENT PROVISION.

In the WILLDERNESS of CONFORMANCE we see God meeting us with His strength and PRESENT PROVISION. In those times of great hurt, sickness and pain many of us know we have to trust in the Lord and even in the points of our weakness, anger and questioning, we find God's ever PRESENT PROVISION for the moment and journey. The Prophet Isaiah reminds us of God's promise, *"Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."* (Isaiah 43:19 ESV)

In the midst of the DESOLATE, our darkest hours of the WILLDERNESS, we can always cling to the PRESENT PROVISION of God's ultimate promise. Though the WILLDERNESS, God is desiring to align and CONFORM us with His WILL while meeting us with His PRESENT PROVISION. Make no mistake. Regardless the WILLDERNESS, He is ever present

and meets us with His grace. In those dry and empty places, do we perceive what God is doing as He is making a way with His PRESENT PROVISION? It is this unbelievable reality about God's character that should rattle our cage and lift our head in the WILLDERNESS. We are not alone. He is with us, and He desires to care for, shape and give us hope by way of His PRESENT PROVISION.

REFLECTION

In your times of the WILLDERNESS, are there places you can point to where God met you with His PRESENT PROVISION?

In what ways did the WILLDERNESS attempt to cause doubt about God's goodness towards you?

How did seeing God's PRESENT PROVISION during these desolate times point you towards His ultimate hope and will for your life?

APPLICATION

-REFLECT: *In the case of the Israelite journey through the TWO WILLDERNESSES, reflect on your experience with the two. How were you moved to be CONFORMED or towards DEFIANCE? How was God there with His Present Provision?*

-READ: Isaiah 41: In this passage what do you see about God's provision for us during times of great trial and WILLDERNESS?

-WRITE: Journal the places that God demonstrated His presence during the times of WILLDERNESS in your life? How does it match with His promise in Isaiah?

-PRAY: *God, help me to embrace your CONFORMANCE in the midst of the WILLDERNESS. In those times of my DEFIANCE, God, meet me with your Provision of grace, and help me to embrace your correction.*

WILDERNESS

FINDING GODS WILL IN THE DESOLATE

CHAPTER 4

OVER THE DESOLATE

WILDERNESS

CHAPTER 4

OVER THE DESOLATE

PASSAGE

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." 4 But he answered, "It is written, " 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' " 5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple 6 and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, " 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and " 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.' " 7 Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.' " 8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, " 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.' " 11 Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

MATTHEW 4:1–11 (ESV)

12 The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.

MARK 1:12–13 (ESV)

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness ² for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. ³ The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." ⁴ And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread

alone.' " ⁵ And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, ⁶ and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸ And Jesus answered him, "It is written, " 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.' " ⁹ And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰ for it is written, " 'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,' ¹¹ and " 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.' " ¹² And Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.' " ¹³ And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

LUKE 4:1-13 (ESV)

But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.

LUKE 5:16 (ESV)

TEMPORARY TEMPTATION

Finally, we are at the point in the journey where we see how the WILLDERNESS should be approached. With Jesus, we get a glimpse of how a true and good human responds to times in the WILLDERNESS. Interestingly enough, in the Hebrew mind and perspective, the WILLDERNESS was a place where sin was cast out. In the WILLDERNESS is where sin and evil resides. At points in any of the previous accounts, we see how God desires to use the WILLDERNESS as a place to demonstrate His power OVER THE DESOLATE, over sin and destruction. In each of the previous accounts, we can see areas where the human response can be good and points where it is

not good. We are left to wonder who can and how will they overcome the WILLDERNESS.

Venturing into the gospels, we are presented with an account of Jesus being lead into the WILLDERNESS. It is difficult for us to embrace, but scripture says Jesus is lead there by the Spirit for a time of TEMPORARY TEMPTATION. It is in this place that Jesus will come face to face with the WILLDERNESS and prove that He is OVER THE DESOLATE. Once in the WILLDERNESS, Jesus is quickly met with an onslaught of opportunities to embrace DEFIANCE. In this TEMPORARY TEMPTATION, Jesus' will is challenged and His fortitude questioned. Opportunity continually arises for Him to embrace a flesh centered approach to His life and to reject God's ultimate design and WILL for Him.

There in the WILLDERNESS, Jesus' whole mission and goal is to prove for all time that God is OVER THE DESOLATE. And it is because of this one simple truth that Jesus, in His triumph, becomes the merger for us to not again fall prey to the trappings of DEFIANCE in the WILLDERNESS. This 40 day period becomes the very visual image that shows because God is OVER THE DESOLATE, we as humanity can respond in the power of the one true human, Jesus.

Forty is the number of days given to Jesus' venture into the WILLDERNESS. It is an allotted time by which God will demonstrate His ultimate will for Jesus' life and thus the WILL for humanity. In this TEMPORARY TEMPTATION, Jesus will present us with encouragement and comfort that the

WILLDERNESS is no longer a place to fear, but one to enter into with confidence because He is OVER THE DESOLATE.

REFLECTION

Where are the WILLDERNESS moments when you have doubted whether God was OVER THE DESOLATE? When you thought things were far out of His control or questioned what He was doing?

What are some TEMPORARY TEMPTATIONS that have progressed into WILLDERNESSES of sin in your life? Have these TEMPORARY TEMPTATIONS caused you moments of DEFIANCE?

Seeing how Jesus demonstrated the power of God OVER THE WILLDERNESS, how does this embolden you during those WILLDERNESS times? During times of TEMPORARY TEMPTATION?

CONQUERING TRANSGRESSION

Looking back on the accounts we have covered there is a main theme weaved throughout each one. Although there have been flickers of times when these human specimens have leaned in the right direction during the WILLDERNESS, there is a glaring thought that invades our mind, "We need a better human." When facing the WILLDERNESS, we will have to often combat attacks of the enemy and reasons why we should TRANSGRESS against God and embrace the pull to act according to our own will. In the WILLDERNESS we see these examples, such as Israel, given opportunity to further trust and lean into God's provision and dream, met by their obstinance and rebellion. The question is, "Who can OVERCOME the DESOLATE?"

Jesus has been lead into the WILLDERNESS. Here He will be met by an onslaught of the enemy's attack. During a forty day period, Jesus is pressed against on every side. Physically, spiritually, emotionally, all of these areas of pain become leverage to accept TRANSGRESSION. Satan engages Him in each area in an effort to use the circumstance of the DESOLATE as a means for Jesus to redefine His identity according to the perceived need and not God's ultimate plan. As with the Israelites, Jesus is presented with every opportunity to grumble against God, to refuse a posture of CONFORMANCE and to embrace DEFIANCE and TRANSGRESSION. Yet, unlike Israel, Jesus will make way to

answer our question. He will prove that He is OVER THE DESOLATE by CONQUERING TRANSGRESSION.

What Jesus ultimately does is to provide us with the example of that, "better human." Through CONQUERING TRANSGRESSION in the WILLDERNESS, we see that God alone is OVER THE DESOLATE. Therefore, when we enter these DESOLATE times in our own lives, our way to embrace God in the midst of hurt, pain and sorrow is provided only by His strength at work in us. In this account, Jesus does not only present us with an example of how we can CONQUER TRANSGRESSION in the midst of the DESOLATE, but crushes TEMPORARY TEMPTATION so that we can live as more than CONQUERORS.

Amazingly enough, there in the WILLDERNESS is where sin and TRANSGRESSION seem to wait, like a lion hunting its prey, for us in our weakness, Jesus crushes any power these things could ever hold against us. It is solely because of Jesus that we can move from a position of fearing the WILLDERNESS to one that embraces the DESOLATE as the place where God will further CONQUER TRANSGRESSION's hold on us. Jesus is OVER THE DESOLATE, and because of this I too can walk in earnest trust that in Him I can find strength where I am weak, provision in my time of need, and find Him CONQUERING TRANSGRESSION in and through me.

JESUS IS OVER THE DESOLATE

REFLECTION

Reflecting on past WILLDERNESS times, were there extreme circumstances that pressed in against you on all sides? How were you moved towards TRANSGRESSION? In other words, how were your “felt needs”, at the time, used against you?

What are some things that the enemy uses to attack you or tempt you during times of the WILLDERNESS?

Knowing that Jesus is OVER THE WILLDERNESS, how does this move you to lean further into Him during these times?

What hope does seeing Jesus CONQUERING TRANSGRESSION when in WILLDERNESS times bring?

PAVED WAY

When we finally see that Jesus is OVER THE DESOLATE it is an awesome perspective. Yet, knowing that and embracing it are two different things. For many of us, what we want God to do is rid our lives of these WILLDERNESS journeys. Can't we just have the easy road? Can't streets of gold later meet with streets of gold now? And this struggle is understandable considering what the WILLDERNESS so often can bring. What if Jesus OVERCOMING the WILLDERNESS was a means to shift our response from fear to one that we embrace? What if the WILLDERNESS was more about a means to THRIVE? What if He PAVED WAY for us to find LIFE IN THE DESOLATE?

One of the most curious things about Jesus' life is His embrace of the WILLDERNESS. Continually, throughout Jesus' ministry, He would retreat into the WILLDERNESS as a means of restoration. It would almost seem as though Jesus repurposed what was once seen as a residence only for sin, into a retreat of communion. Luke gives us a little insight into this as he records in 5:10, *"But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray."*

When Jesus walked out of the WILLDERNESS after those 40 days, he made it evidently clear that nothing is beyond His sovereign reign and rule. Jesus proved what the enemy so often means for destruction are places He meets with His restoration. Flipping the script, Jesus shifted our perspective on the DESOLATE. While we may see the WILLDERNESS as something that should be avoided at all costs, Jesus helps us see that the DESOLATE can often be

times where we find the strongest communion with God. When all is stripped away and our great need is left to bare, it is here that our soul can find true rest, restoration and fulfillment in God.

Amazingly so, Jesus would continue to use the WILLDERNESS as a place to recenter Himself on God's ultimate plan for His life. When even all the best of things were pressing in on Jesus, healing, teaching, meeting the needs of the people, Jesus would use the DESOLATE to recalibrate His soul. His embrace of the WILLDERNESS were times He used to allow the DESOLATE to PAVE WAY for God's ultimate will. Because He is OVER THE DESOLATE, anything the WILLDERNESS may seem to take will only be met by His WILL of restoration.

WILLDERNESS times will come. They are certain realities. If we are in relationship with Jesus, fear doesn't have to be our modus operandi. If the One that is OVER THE WILLDERNESS has PAVED WAY for us, then we can follow in His lead and embrace these times knowing God will use them for His purpose. These times that the enemy may mean for bad can be met by God's PAVED WAY towards what is GOOD. The WILLDERNESS does not have to be a place that is defined by what may be lost. It can be defined by a SAVIOR that has OVERCOME and PAVED WAY for us to find deeper relationship with Him. The WILLDERNESS can be a time where we find a recalibration of grace and become further aligned with God's WILL.

Remember the words of Isaiah, *"Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."* Jesus is OVER THE DESOLATE and has PAVED WAY for His WILL in places where there seems to be no way.

REFLECTION

Do you fear the WILLDERNESS?

Seeing how Jesus PAVED WAY for us to see the WILLDERNESS as a means to reentering our lives on GOD's will, how are you moved from fear?

How have you seen the WILLDERNESS move you into deeper relationship with Jesus? How can you embrace these times more centered on finding God's restoration?

APPLICATION

-REFLECT: *Reflecting on past WILLDERNESS journeys, how have you seen Jesus demonstrate that He is OVER THE DESOLATE?*

-READ: Romans 8. What is the perspective Paul uses in correlation with the WILLDERNESS?

-WRITE: *Journal your thoughts on how God is calling you to embrace these WILLDERNESS times to better see Him do a great work in you. How is He moving you to move in the future compared with the past?*

-PRAY: *Jesus, the WILLDERNESS is a difficult place. So many times we fear what could seem to bring harm. Yet, it is in the desolate that we are met with a greater sense of Your Presence. Lord, would you help me to move from fear and to EMBRACE your WILL in the midst of my WILLDERNESS?*

CONCLUSION

WILL-DERNESS : Desert; desolate, bewildering situation

The WILLDERNESS; it is an assured place and part of our journey through life. Whether times of self inflicted DESOLATION or due to unforeseen measures beyond our control, we will find ourselves in times of the DESOLATE. Through this series, the objective has been to provide ways that we can first, determine the WILLDERNESS we may be in, and second see ways from which God is using these times to align us closer to Him and His WILL.

Now on this side of the series, and at a point of keen awareness, how has the WILLDERNESS shaped your life? Have you been drawn closer to God on the journey, seeing His provisional hand and WILL meeting you along the way, or are you a product of your circumstances? Allowing yourself to become identified by all the things the WILLDERNESS brings? In the face of certain DESOLATION, we are met with opportunity in our response. We can choose to allow these DESOLATE places to be used for God's ultimate glory, or we can find ourselves wandering in the WILLDERNESS with no end in sight. There may be nothing we can do to spare ourselves the trial, hurt, hardship or pain, but rather than allowing those things to lie about who our God is, we can find God PROPELLING us with His PRESENCE towards His WILL.

The WILLDERNESS may be a place that was intended for evil, but as Joseph reminds us, what others, the enemy and rebellion may mean for evil God can use for ultimate good. How are you walking in the way of Jesus and embracing these WILLDERNESS times as a means to God reclaiming us with His goodness? When we find ourselves in the WILLDERNESS, we can move from attempting to sidestep it in fear and enter it with full assurance that Jesus is OVER

WILLDERNESS

THE DESOLATE. Whatever the WILLDERNESS journey you are on, or are about to venture through, take heart oh weary traveler. Jesus knows the DESOLATE intimately. He knows it not from a far off place looking down and cheering us on through it. Rather, He knows it from our perspective, has experienced everything we have and has overcome what we could never do on our own.

JESUS IS OVER THE DESOLATE. HE IS KING OF THE WILLDERNESS, and if you lean into it, He will use your DESOLATE as a place of drawing others to His ultimate goodness. His WILL is found in the WILLDERNESS.



WILDERNESS