

# SMALL GROUP GUIDE

## INTO THE *Wild*



THE STORY OF EXODUS

## CIRCLES 01/03: **ENTERING THE WILDERNESS: GOD'S POWER**

Detours are inevitable, aren't they? We see them on the road, in the airport, and in our daily lives. Have you ever taken a detour in life? You think you're right on track, but then you realize you're a few hundred miles in the wrong direction. Life seldom follows our exact specifications, so detours happen. I know you've been on a life detour because you're human. It's both expected and inevitable. This was especially evident in the lives of the Israelites early in their history.

Israel's detour story unfolds in the book of Exodus. The book's title literally translates to a *mass exit*. Who is exiting? The nation of Israel was escaping a dreadful era. Moses, the author, opened his historical book with a shocking scene: God's people were in slavery. For centuries, they were promised a glorious land that had everything they needed to be happy and never go hungry. They dreamt of this perfect place with rolling hills, a thriving environment for crops, flowing streams for swimming, and an amazing school system.

Eager Israelites woke up from their dreams of a promised land to a living nightmare in Egypt. The powerful Egyptian nation enslaved God's people and forced them to work nonstop in the scorching heat. If they struggled, the Egyptians whipped them. If they complained, the Egyptians cursed at them. If they rebelled, the Egyptians killed them. It was a disgusting existence. Fortunately for them, it was temporary.

God appointed a man named Moses to set them free. Raised as Egyptian royalty, he rebelled against the kingdom that initially claimed him. After Moses realized he was Hebrew, God called him to rescue his own people from the abusive grip of Egypt. Moses stood up to Pharaoh and demanded his people be set free. After a lot of fighting and a dozen plagues, Moses set Israel free. As Egypt disappeared into the background, God's people fled for their lives. They could smell the flowers and taste the honey of the promised land. Freedom and prosperity were on the horizon.

However, their thrilling journey was met with a detour called the Red Sea. Running from the Egyptian army, they found themselves on the shore of the sea with waves lapping beneath their leather-strapped shoes. They didn't have a boat or a bridge, so what were they going to do? Would their freedom only last a day? Let's see what happens.

### **Exodus 14:13-16; 21-22**

Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still." Then the LORD said to

Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground.” [...] Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

When Moses delivered Israel’s emancipation proclamation, the people found themselves on the fast track to freedom. At least that’s what they imagined. All of their problems should have disappeared when they left the work camp. They were no longer slaves. They were no longer enduring daily beatings. They were free people. However, freedom from slavery didn’t mean freedom from difficult situations. As they fled Pharaoh, the caravan came to a screeching halt. The Red Sea roared before them. It was a massive barricade, especially with an entire army of Egyptians clamoring behind them.

They could hear the waves crashing and Egypt’s chariots approaching. What were they going to do? Moses looked up to heaven with a sigh and a shrug. God encouraged him to not be afraid and simply lift his hands towards the sky. With his trusty rod firmly gripped, Moses extended his arms like a referee after a field goal. The earth shook, the waves convulsed, and a clear path appeared right through the middle. With walls of water on both sides of God’s people, they journeyed through the sea on dry land. That night, over a million people crossed the Red Sea without a boat or lifejacket. God performed a miracle, ensuring His people were free at last.

As we explore the journey of ancient Israel, we can learn three lessons from this story. Each should act as a source of encouragement when life sends you on a detour the long way through the wilderness.

### **The shortest route isn’t always the best one.**

There were three different routes out of Egypt. The one Israel took was the longest by far. Furthermore, the Red Sea sprawled just after the starting line. Why didn’t they take the shorter route that didn’t require them to cross a massive body of water? Exodus 13:17-18 explains, “For God said, ‘If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.’ So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea.”

The other strategies would have taken them right through enemy territory, which would have been an accidental act of war. Israel was in their infancy. They were weak, wounded, and weary from nine generations in captivity. They never learned to fight; they

simply learned to submit. Israel didn't have the strength to stand up to a sophisticated army, so God told Moses to take them the long way through the wilderness. God protected them by rerouting them.

Our Father does the same for us. God often takes us the long way because we are not ready to take the short way. He knows if you're not emotionally, mentally, or spiritually strong enough to face the battles ahead. That means He may take you on a detour to prevent your downfall. Let God protect you by rerouting you. The shortest way may not be the best way because it may send you towards enemy territory. It may take more time, but it's for your good.

### **God often orchestrates obstacles.**

Crossing the Red Sea was among the greatest miracles Israel had ever seen. They spent centuries stuck and struggling in slavery, but God set them free. You'd assume it would be smooth sailing, right? Wrong. A trial was on the other side of their triumph.

Here's the kicker. God actually orchestrated this obstacle. He sent them on this journey, and He knew the Red Sea was in the way. Why would He set them up for a trial so soon? God wanted His people to fully rely on Him. That's why he allows trials in the first place. They help us grow in resilience and reliance. There was no way for Israel to cross without God's miracle. They had to trust God's plan.

Does the journey seem impassable or impossible? Does your next step seem shrouded in mystery? Are you struggling to work up the strength to move forward? That's good news because God turns obstacles into opportunities. He wants to remind you that He ultimately owns the outcome. Praise God for the obstacles in your way. They'll help you grow in faith and surrender. What you see as an obstacle, Jehovah sees as an opportunity. Trust God in trying times—a miracle is in the works.

### **God will make a way where there is no way.**

Have you ever felt like the Israelites? You thought things were looking up, but now you're face-to-face with an obstacle the size of a sea as an army advances in the distance? You're feeling trapped, directionless, and stuck. It's a bad feeling, but the perfect place to be. Why? Because it means God can turn your trial into a miracle.

It's hard, though. We focus on the crashing waves and the roaring army while losing sight of our destiny. Don't focus on the army behind you; focus on the path God has provided ahead of you. God's timing is perfect, and His track record is flawless. He will send help

at the exact time you need it. Our Deliverer meets our needs miraculously and consistently. While it may seem like there is no way, God will make a way.

What's the Red Sea situation in front of you? Do you have a loved one struggling with addiction? Do you need strength to carry on after a tragedy in your family? Do you have no idea how to make the right decision? Do you need healing after a dreadful breakup? Whatever it is, it's normal to feel like there's no way out. Fortunately for you and the Hebrews, God is in the business of parting the Red Sea. Even if it's impossible or inconceivable, God will give you a path right through whatever predicament you face. Trust in His character, dependability, and power. He will make a way out.

Israel ultimately crossed the sea and watched as the walls of water swallowed up their enemies. You'd think this was the end of their story. They were free. God had performed a miracle. The sealing of the sea showed them that turning back was not an option. While things were looking up, they were still far from the Promised Land. They were about to journey through the wilderness for a few years. Actually, they would be out there for forty years. God took them from captivity in Egypt to uncertainty in the wilderness. Fortunately, their time in the wilderness proved to be exactly what they needed. That's where we'll pick up next time.

## TALK IT OUT

*Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.*

Ice Breaker: Go around your circle and share this week's highs and lows. What was the best part of your week, and what was the lowest part of your week?

Q1: Tell us about a time you got lost. How did it make you feel?

Q2: What stuck out to you from the message?

Q3: Israel was in the wilderness. What do you think it metaphorically means to find yourself in a "wilderness"?

Q4: Have you ever seen God turn someone's obstacle into an opportunity? Tell us about it.

Q5: What is a "Red Sea" situation in front of you right now?

Application: Imagine your Red Sea situation. Now imagine God parting the obstacle in half to allow you to walk through. Ask God to help you walk through it on dry land.

## READING PLAN

*READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY*

Exodus 1-2

Exodus 3-4

Exodus 5-6

Exodus 7-8

Exodus 9-10

Exodus 11-12

Exodus 13-14

Do the following with each passage:

ASK– God to connect with you here. In prayer, start by slowing down and inviting God to be present. Begin with focus and openness to see what God has for you today.

READ– the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that intrigue you, reading them a second time if necessary.

REFLECT– on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?

RESPOND– to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.

## CIRCLES 02/03: **ENDURING THE WILDERNESS: GOD'S PROVISION**

When we left off, God's people had just experienced a miracle at the Red Sea. They were on cloud nine as they danced towards their freedom and their Promised Land. However, there was a much larger obstacle than any sea in their way: the wilderness. By its sheer difficulty, it made the sea look like a stream. What was Israel to do? They had to learn to endure the wilderness.

I am a creature of habit. I consistently build routines that I repeat like a broken record. For instance, my nights are as predictable as the sunset. I do my skincare routine, drink a cup of Sleepytime tea, read a few chapters of a book, and wind down while listening to the same exact Spotify playlist as the night before. If I get them out of order or skip the routine, my week will derail. It's both a comfort and a curse.

A major part of a routine is repetition. You do the same thing over and over again. You eat the same thing over and over again. You take the same steps over and over again. I find comfort in this, but my wife thinks it's crazy. She'll ponder, "How do you drink the same smoothie every morning and the same tea every night? Don't you want some variety?" She's not wrong. Sometimes I get sick of the same chia smoothie and the same chamomile tea, so I break the routine. Frustration gets the best of me, and I rebel against my routine. When I do this, I feel great at first, but I will eventually long for the familiar.

A little variety is good for the soul. I am certain the ancient Israelites agreed. Their routine in Egypt was finally interrupted! No more toiling in the fields. No more lugging bricks. No more daily check-ins with their masters. God had just set them free from slavery by parting the Red Sea and allowing them to walk freely into their promising futures. However, they didn't immediately step into the Promised Land or an all-inclusive resort. It was not as bad as slavery, but it certainly wasn't a "land of milk and honey" either. Their painful routine in Egypt was replaced with a problematic routine in the wild.

Do you know what was on the other side of the Red Sea? Endless wilderness. It was desolate, dusty, and demanding. While they were thankful to be out of captivity, the people craved at least a sliver of luxury. A million people were suddenly stuck in the desert. How do you think they felt? They used to live near the Nile River on fertile farmland on the outskirts of Egypt. They had plentiful crops, running water, and a place to take a bath. It was lush and green. Now, they were surrounded by a dozen shades of brown. Dirt, rocks, and mud served as the only scenery.

I would assume no one sent out a postcard saying, “Wish you were here.” Why? Because *they* didn’t even want to be there. There was no way to nourish themselves. There was no way to shower. There was no way to brew their favorite cup of tea. They had to rely on God to provide. What did God do? Of course, He came through. Take a look at how he helped His people endure the wilderness.

**READ: Exodus 16:2-4**

In the desert, the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.” Then the LORD said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day.”

At some point in your life, you will find yourself in the wilderness. Not literally, but emotionally. You’ll feel exhausted, exacerbated, and longing for an escape. You’re not where you were, but you’re also not where you want to be. You’re stuck in the in-between. This is when we enter the wilderness. Suddenly, we become campers longing for a better place to rest our heads. As far as the Bible is concerned, “wilderness” is a common theme. It’s not just sandy dunes with sunburn and snakes though. It’s also a metaphor for places of challenging “in-betweens.”

Unfortunately, the Israelites found themselves in both a spiritual and a literal wilderness. It was harsh and hard, so they did exactly what we would do in this situation. They complained a lot. Their surroundings were scary, and their stomachs were empty. “God, why are we here? We’d rather die in Egypt than live out here,” they grumbled.

How did God respond to their cries? He provided. Every day, a strange food called *manna* rained from the sky. What is that? Well, that’s actually a funny question. “Manna” is Hebrew for “What is it?” It was called this because they had never seen these little angel cakes before. So, they just gave it a name that defined its mystery. Manna was unexpected, but it was also exactly what they needed. It was nutritious, plentiful, and free. Every sunrise, they’d walk outside to see little pillows of bread-y treats around their campsite. They’d collect just enough, eat it, then gather some more the next day. God provided for Israel in the wilderness, which allowed them to endure the wilderness. The same is true for you. God provides, so you can endure.



With manna-filled bellies, the Israelites still fell into a few traps. You may fall into similar patterns and pitfalls, so here are two warnings for your wilderness season.

**The wilderness can be a place of frustration.**

God's children made their frustration loud and clear. They complained to Moses, their leader. They complained to Aaron, his assistant. They complained to Jehovah, their God. They doubted God's provision and questioned His love. Even as food fell from heaven, they shrugged and said, "What is it?" Even when God was providing, they didn't recognize it.

In your wilderness season, learn from the Israelites. Don't let your frustration create an ungrateful heart or an unfaithful spirit. Trust that God's provision is exactly what you need when you need it. It may be some weird version of bread, but it's still provision. It may be a job you hate, but it's still provision. It may be a church with creaky pews, but it's still provision. Try to recognize the ways God provides because His provision doesn't usually follow our specifications.

Our frustration in the wilderness reveals a lack of reliance on God. So, how do we overcome it? We live like manna-eating campers at times. Every morning, they gathered their daily bread. They entered into a life of faith-filled routine. Do the same. Endure your wilderness "one day at a time." This is a common phrase in therapy. In recovery programs and support groups, people are challenged to take their journey "one day at a time."

God will give you the provision you need one day at a time. Every new sunrise gives you new endurance. Don't invest today's anxiety in tomorrow's hardships. Fight that urge. God has given you exactly what you need exactly when you need it. Your wilderness is a journey. Morning mercies are your fuel, Scripture is your guide, and restoration is your destination. You will get there eventually, but time travel doesn't exist. Work through the process with God. You're going to get out of the wilderness—just take it one day at a time.

**The wilderness can be a place of forgetfulness.**

Think of everything these people had experienced. God sent plagues to prove his power. God provided Moses to lead them home. God parted the Red Sea to set them free. They were literal slaves a few weeks before, and now they were a free nation. Miracle after miracle, their story was surrounded by the supernatural. Sadly, they allowed their frustration to make them forgetful.

We do this all the time. We forget all the amazing ways God has provided for us in the past when in the middle of the wilderness. God brought you through similar seasons; He will bring you through this one. You've made friends when loneliness swept over you, you've gotten rest when your mind raced with anxiety, and you've felt renewed joy when your surroundings were discouraging. He's provided for you, blessed you, and protected you. Remember that. Reflect on that. It will rejuvenate you.

Don't allow the wilderness to make you forgetful. Israel saw a desert; God gave them a breadbasket. They saw dry land; God produced water. They saw a wilderness; God sparked wonders. God provided daily and miraculously for them, just like He does for you. Your frustration and forgetfulness will fade as you remember God's faithfulness.

**The wilderness can be a place of faith-building.**

Manna on the ground seems pretty weird, right? Sometimes God provides for us in weird ways. Embrace this reminder. God's provision is not defined by our expectations. We cannot prescribe it or predict it. He will simply do what is right for us. As you wait in the wilderness, embrace who you know God to be instead of what you think He should do. It will build your faith when your surroundings seem fruitless.

As you cling to faith with all your might, your wilderness frustration will fade—making way for renewed faith. Can God provide for your financial ruin? Of course. Stay strong. Can He comfort you in a place of depression and discouragement? Of course. Hold onto hope. Can God work a wonder in your wilderness? Of course. Keep the faith as you wait.

The author of Hebrews defines faith as “the confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1). Even when you cannot see a way out, faith allows you to be assured that everything will turn out just fine. Faith is not a thought or a feeling; it's a lifestyle. Don't let your frustration or forgetfulness uproot your faith. You may see a wilderness, but God sees a way out. Cling to that. Celebrate that. Find comfort in that. You'll find a way out of the wilderness because God's in the business of breakthrough.

## TALK IT OUT

*Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.*

Ice Breaker: Go around your circle and share this week's highs and lows. What was the best part of your week, and what was the lowest part of your week?

Q1: What is your morning/evening routine?

Q2: What stuck out to you from this message?

Q3: God provided for Israel. Why do you think Israel still grumbled and complained?

Q4: What can you do during a wilderness season to remind yourself of God's power and provision?

Q5: What is a place in your life where you need God to provide?

Application: Make a long list of God's provisions in the past. Write down everything He's given you and all the ways He's taken care of you. Return to this in times of frustration and forgetfulness.

## READING PLAN

*READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY*

Exodus 15

Exodus 16

Exodus 17

Exodus 18

Exodus 19

Exodus 20

Exodus 21-22

Do the following with each passage:

ASK– God to connect with you here. In prayer, start by slowing down and inviting God to be present. Begin with focus and openness to see what God has for you today.

READ– the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that intrigue you, reading them a second time if necessary.

REFLECT– on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?

RESPOND– to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.

## CIRCLES 03/03: **EMBRACING THE WILDERNESS: GOD'S PRESENCE**

As we come to the close of our study through Exodus, the Israelites have learned how to endure the wilderness but haven't really embraced it yet. God had given them physical provision, but they needed to embrace His spiritual provision. God didn't want them to just build a campfire or set up a tent community; God called them to build a sanctuary in the middle of the sand. Why? To help His people worship Him in the midst of the wilderness.

As a child, I was captivated by the idea of discovering buried treasure. Blame Peter Pan for this weird hobby. Like the captain in that story, I was hooked. Little shovel in hand, I unearthed broken bottles, random car parts, a Barbie doll, and what looked to be an extremely rare coin. Gleefully, I dusted off the coin and ran home to show it to my grandmother. The coin looked old, really old, so I assumed she could help me evaluate my treasure. Peering at the coin through her glasses, she remarked, "This is very interesting."

"How much is it worth?" I asked.

"Twenty-five cents," she replied with a smirk. With a little cleaning, the rust-toned coin transformed into a shiny silver quarter. "It's only three years old. This can buy you a gumball at the hair salon."

Some people are luckier than I was. In 2013, a California couple was playing with their dog in their backyard. Their game of fetch was interrupted when they noticed a rusty can poking out of the clay. Carefully, they picked it up and shook it. What they heard was music to their ears. The sound of money reverberated from the can. The confused couple opened the rusty vessel to discover nearly one hundred \$20 gold coins. They kept looking around their property only to discover dozens more cans filled with hundreds more coins. All in all, they found over 1,000 coins on the outskirts of the desert.<sup>1</sup>

You might be thinking, "I've never heard of a \$20 gold coin." Exactly. These metal circles are extremely rare. These coins were pressed from 1847 to 1894. Back then, America's currency was unstable and ever-changing. Thus, collectors would be chomping at the bit to see them. Even at face value, they had nearly \$20,000 worth of currency sitting in their backyard. However, each coin was worth far more than twenty bucks. Most of those coins sold somewhere between \$500,000 and \$1,000,000. To this day, this unexpected couple has found one of the most valuable buried treasures in North America—and they weren't even looking for it.

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<sup>1</sup> "California couple finds \$10M in gold coins buried in yard," February 25, 2014, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/california-couple-finds-10m-gold-coins-buried-yard-n38471>.

Buried treasure in the desert has consumed explorers for centuries. People obsess over it, spend fortunes trying to find it, and watch cheesy television shows about it. The Israelites found themselves in a desert, yes. Was there any buried treasure? No. They were in an uncharted land, so the chance of finding a treasure chest full of coins and snacks was close to zero. But God gave them gift after gift and treasure after treasure while in the desert, going so much further than quail and manna.

Last time, we dissected Israel's physical provision in the wilderness. God supernaturally gave them food, water, and shelter. He provided for their physical needs, but that was only a small portion of God's plan. Sure, God wanted them to rely on him for their physical needs. But, one goal was far more important: God wanted them to rely on Him for their spiritual needs. This is where we begin to see the treasure within the wilderness. Not to get ahead of ourselves, but that treasure is found in the true God.

**READ: Exodus 25: 1-8**

The LORD said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from everyone whose heart prompts them to give. These are the offerings you are to receive from them: gold, silver and bronze; blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen; goat hair; ram skins dyed red and another type of durable leather; acacia wood; olive oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breast piece. Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them."

At this point in their history, Israel was well acquainted with the wilderness. The desert had become their dwelling place. After a lot of frustration, God's people were finally starting to build their own nation. God gave them laws, established a government, and continued to provide for their physical needs. Now, it was time to seal the deal. They needed a place to worship.

In Exodus 25, God gave the Israelites detailed instructions on how to build the "Tent of Meeting." They were to build a portable sanctuary complete with places to worship, sacrifice, pray, and experience God's presence. I love the fact that Israel's first temple was portable, proving that God desired to be with them wherever they traveled. Their surroundings would change, but their God would remain steady.

Why did God want them to build the *Tent of Meeting* in the first place? It was to give His people comfort when life was changing, structure when their journey was chaotic, and

safety when their surroundings were scary. Their portable sanctuary blessed them with a sense of security in the wilderness.

Just like Israel, your time in the wilderness will give you spiritual treasures. Look for them, cling to them, and embrace them. Can't see them? Stop grumbling, keep your eyes open, and ensure your heart is ready to receive. Here are three treasures that await you in the wilderness.

### **Festivals**

Let's step into a time machine and go back to the intro of Exodus. Moses stood before Pharaoh, stuttering over his words and fidgeting with his staff, to make a bold proclamation. He said, "This is what the LORD, God of Israel, says. 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the wilderness'" (Exodus 5:1). This passage blows my mind because it reveals that the wilderness was not a surprise. It was always part of the plan. God wanted His people to celebrate their festivals in the middle of the desert. It wasn't a detour; it was their destiny.

What does Moses mean by festivals? Don't imagine a carnival with cheesy games and dangerous rides. Think of these as big holiday services at your local church. Everyone shows up, dressed in their Sunday best, and celebrates the resurrection or the birth. These are beautiful moments that we crave all year round. Religious festivals were central to Jewish life. Jewish believers had nearly a dozen religious festivals defined by worship, sacrifice, and feasting. God wanted them to hold their festivals outside of captivity and within the wilderness. God wanted His people to learn how to worship in the wilderness.

A lot of you are in a wilderness season. I am sorry to hear that. In the spiritual desert, everything seems barren, dead, and desolate. Whether you're longing for a different life, mending a bruised identity, or desperately searching for answers, you are in good company. Vast sections of the Bible follow the stories of fellow wanderers, seekers, and campers. Worship in the wilderness. Lift your hands despite your aching. Pray and sing loudly despite your hoarse voice. Allow the desert to draw you closer to your Deliverer.

### **Freedom**

Wrap your mind around this: Israel was forced to build palaces, pyramids, and temples for people that hated them. Nine generations of building, sweating, and working without getting to step foot in the finished product. Look how far they'd come. They were free now! They could use their excruciating experiences to build structures for their own

people that their families would get to enjoy. Thanks to their freedom, they had built their own homes, and now it was time to build a House of the Lord.

The story of Exodus is the story of freedom. God's plan for Israel then is the same plan He has for you now. God wants you to walk in freedom, live out your freedom, and share freedom with your friends. Exodus is proof that true liberation cannot exist outside of God's presence. That's why building a portable sanctuary was so important.

Sadly, Israel was prone to shortsighted thinking. They thought that freedom was solely found outside of Egypt. That's only partially true. True freedom is not just escaping Egypt; it's experiencing God.

We can fall into the same faulty thinking. We assume that freedom is only found in leaving something behind. Freedom is not just escaping an unhealthy relationship, stopping bad behavior, or overcoming a negative thought pattern. That's only partial freedom. True freedom is found when you escape what's holding you back and embrace Jesus. Both steps are critical for experiencing the true gift of freedom.

### **Fellowship with God**

Why did God want the Israelites in the wilderness? Why did God ask them to build a sanctuary? Why did God set them free in the first place? The answer to all those questions is found in Exodus 25:8. God said, "Have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them."

God wants to be with you. It's as simple as that. He longs for fellowship with His followers. Sometimes it requires a trip through the wilderness to help us see that God authentically wants to dwell with us. The tabernacle served as a tangible product of a spiritual principle. God was with the Israelites every step of the way. When plagues shook their enslavers, God was near. When God protected their children during the Passover, God was near. When the Red Sea ripped in half, God was near. When they felt stuck in the wilderness, God was near.

This concept is true for you too. God is near—right now. Even in the wilderness, embrace God's nearness. God surrounds you in the same way the ocean surrounds a coral reef. Above, below, around, beside—He's all around you. That's especially true in the wilderness.

When was the last time you felt God's presence in a real, unmistakable way? If it's been a while, the wilderness may be on the way. God uses wilderness seasons to help you set up camp with your Creator. The wilderness removes your distractions, uproots your plans, and purifies your perspective. Thank God for desert seasons because they'll leave you forever changed. You'll learn to worship, find full freedom, and eventually embrace God's nearness in the wilderness. The Promised Land awaits you; just worship while waiting.



## TALK IT OUT

*Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.*

Ice Breaker: Go around your circle and share this week's highs and lows. What was the best part of your week, and what was the lowest part of your week?

Q1: What is the coolest thing you've ever found?

Q2: What stuck out to you from this message?

Q3: What are some ways wilderness seasons are actually good for us?

Q4: "True freedom is found when you escape what's holding you back and embrace Jesus." What do you think this means?

Q5: What does it look like to worship in the wilderness?

Application: Throw a little worship celebration by yourself this week. Pray. Worship. Sing. Dance. Write. Even paint. Whatever it is, do an activity that helps you experience God's divinity.

## READING PLAN

*READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY*

Exodus 23

Exodus 24

Exodus 25

Exodus 26

Exodus 27

Exodus 28

Exodus 29-30

Do the following with each passage:

ASK- God to connect with you here. In prayer, start by slowing down and inviting God to be present. Begin with focus and openness to see what God has for you today.

READ- the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that intrigue you, reading them a second time if necessary.

REFLECT- on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?

RESPOND- to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.