

Rhythms of the Soul

Title: Part 2 – Man-Made Wilderness

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Transition: Paul Prays & Seats

While everyone here in the house is saying “Hi” as always we want to take a moment to say “Hi” to you if you are joining us online or on our app. No matter what you might have going on in your life right now know that we are FOR you so let us know how we can pray. You can always submit a confidential prayer request from our app or website.

If you have a Bible with you, we're gonna be in Mark's Gospel, chapter one. As you are looking for that go ahead and grab your service guide to take some notes or open our app and you can jot some stuff down there too. I'm calling today's message:

Man-Made Wilderness

We are in the second part of a collection of messages called, “Rhythms of the Soul.” If you missed last week's message I would encourage you to take some time and go back and watch it from our app or website because we are talking about the rhythms of a healthy soul. AND I know that might not be at the top of your list of things this summer, but it should be!

Because here is the truth we don't like to face. If you're not healthy, if you've got dysfunction, if you are burned out and depressed but you look to the future and go, “But it'll get better down the road...” You ever catch yourself saying that? But here's the ugly truth. If we don't change our direction we will arrive exactly where we are going! Where you're at today, play that out, just fast forward the tape 1 year, 5 years, 10 years from now you'll be even more unhealthy. You'll be even more dysfunctional. You'll be even more burned out.

SO, let's make the changes we need to now! Let's get in a good rhythm for the soul! Let's have some good days and build them together, string them together like a string of pearls and one day we'll look back and be proud of the life that we've been living. Amen? Stephen Covey (every Christian's favorite Mormon) once said, *“You can spend your whole life climbing a ladder and get to the end of your life and realize your ladder was propped up against the wrong wall.”* The greatest tragedy in life would be to win at the wrong thing. So, let's figure this out!

Alright, Mark chapter 1. If you are ready to dive into this say, “Let's go!” Mark 1, verse 9:

⁹ At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

¹⁰ Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. [I know you had a good baptism experience. This was better!

And it gets even better, look at this] **¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”** [We've got the Father, Son and Spirit all right here in this amazing

moment. I'm sure this was one of the highlights of Jesus' life. But now verse 12, underline this] **¹² AT ONCE the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, ¹³ and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.**

You guys read that all cas, like that kind of stuff happens to you every day. BUT come on, Jesus is still wet from getting baptized and the skies haven't even been zipped back up yet when the Spirit sends Him out into the wilderness for 40 days to be tempted by Satan! Come on that's not normal!

Like why did the Spirit lead Jesus into the desert? Didn't Jesus tell us to pray, *"...and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil?"* But what does verse 12 say? It says the Spirit sends Him into the wilderness. What's up with that? Jesus has a nice baptism and then He's getting all shooed along into the desert. Then He gets there and Satan's there! He looks back, Spirit's gone. He was tricked into a cage match with the devil that lasted over a month! It's like, what is this some sort of Indiana Jones and the Holy Grail you must pass these three trials thing or you're not worthy to drink from the chalice? "Only the penitent shall pass..."

For a long time, I read this—and even heard it taught—that the wilderness testing was like some sort of strenuous, grueling spartan challenge. And if Jesus could make it through the 40 days, if He could succeed where the first Adam failed. Right? Adam failed against temptation, so God sends Jesus as the second Adam to succeed where Adam failed. But if Jesus couldn't handle the hardship of the desert, then He wasn't ready to take on the even greater challenge that lied ahead of Him at the cross.

And so, I picture Jesus kinda like curled up in a ball going, "It's only my imagination. It's only my imagination" like Kevin McAllister in the basement. And He's getting weaker and weaker and weaker. At the 40-day mark, he's so weak, the devil shows up, He's barely hanging on, BUT He manages somehow to rally Himself like Rocky Balboa, you know. He's emaciated and sick, but still, somehow He prevails as the soundtrack begins playing the intro to Eye of the Tiger.

BUT all that presupposes one fallacy. And when I realized this it changed everything for me. It presupposes that Jesus did **NOT** like the wilderness. That somehow He found it draining. That the wilderness took Him away from God's presence. BUT if that was the case then the rest of the Gospel accounts of Jesus life don't make much sense. For example, Mark 1:35:

³⁵ And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a DESOLATE place, and there he prayed.

The word "desolate" is the same word translated as "wilderness" in verse 12. Same idea in the original language, wilderness, desolate, solitary places that He retreated to on purpose! Now look at Matthew 14:23:

²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone.

After a hard day's work where did Jesus choose to go? He went up into the mountains alone. This is not the Spirit leading like we talked about, this isn't being pushed into some horrible challenge. This is Jesus, of His own free will, after a crazy day realizing, "I'm depleted. I'm pretty spent, you know what I need? The wilderness!"

And it wasn't just mornings and evenings either because Luke's gospel tells us, Luke 5:16, it says Jesus:

So He Himself OFTEN withdrew into the WILDERNESS and prayed.

The point I hope you see today is the wilderness, solitary places, those aren't some awful thing that Jesus had to endure. This wasn't Jesus being forced to a place of brokenness or weakness. No! This was actually Jesus being led to a place of strength! What I'm trying to get you to see is that the Spirit didn't lead Jesus into the wilderness so that He could be tempted. The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness because He WAS going to be tempted! Do you see that?

The temptations coming, the hard things are coming, this whole huge ministry is about to begin, there's gonna be three and a half years of hardship capped off by the hardest thing a human being has ever had to

do. So, You need to start it off with a full tank and the wilderness is where you can get filled up so that You can handle all that's to come.

Write this down:

The wilderness didn't make overcoming temptation more difficult; it made it possible.

That changes everything doesn't it? This wasn't torture for Jesus. These 40 days weren't strenuous. No! This was a strategy that He employed at the leading of the Holy Spirit.

So, what does that mean for you and me today? What this means for you and me, is as we assess our lives, with all that is in front of us, we ask how can I be like Jesus and follow in the footsteps of the Son of man into the wilderness. Man-made wilderness. Does the title make more sense now? Man-made wilderness.

So, here is Jesus getting strong by being in the wilderness. Why? Because there He found the calm and the quiet. We talked last week that the heartbeat behind a healthy soul is to be able to calm and quiet our souls. David said that, remember? He said I have learned to calm and to quiet my soul. **If you don't quiet your soul, you won't have a quiet soul.** Because we live in a very loud world. We live in a world that's anything but calm and anything but quiet.

Jim Collins (the author of Good to Great) said:

“We live in a cacophonous age, swarming insects of noise and interruption buzzing about—emails, text messages, cable news, advertisements, cell phones, meetings, wireless web connections, social media posts, we run the risk of waking up at the end of the year having accomplished little of significance, each year slipping by in a flurry of activity pointing nowhere. Leaders can—indeed must—be disciplined people who create the quiet space for disciplined thought and summon the strength for disciplined action.”

Why is Jesus in the wilderness for 40 days? He's listening to the Spirit who's calling Him into a season of creating space for discipline thought, for remembering who He is, so that when the devil shows up [BOOM] Jesus has an answer for every attack! Read the account in Luke 4. Jesus has a blistering rebuttal for every temptation. Satan's like, “Oh, this fool's been preparing himself!”

But come on, **Jesus had the strength because He had first created the space!** This was a man centered and anchored in the wilderness! He was not depleted! He was energized! His soul was in a good rhythm so He was ready for what would come next. And please hear me, **we need the same or we will forfeit all of our peace and sanity.**

Because let's stop and just acknowledge the times that we're living in. We didn't know what was happening as the world changed all around us in 2007! Some of you are like, “2007... I can't remember last week, what was 2007?” 2007 is when the iPhone was released to the masses. Steve Jobs held it up for the first time, “Now we will all have infinity in our pocket.” Think about that, in all of human history, no one's ever had infinity in their pocket!

If you give a 9- or 10-year-old a car with no instruction, guess what's gonna happen? They are going to make a mess of things, right? "Dad, I really made a mess of things..." Of course, you did because you were handed a car without instruction! You weren't ready for it!

Hello! We have infinity in pockets, we didn't know what we were doing and worse is we've handed it over to our kids! We now have a ceaseless stream of input coming at all times. And I'm not just talking about the bad stuff. Even positive things like Ted talks, YouTube lectures, college courses, last week's message that you missed, audible books, podcasts, so many podcasts... so now I've got to have a Bluetooth speaker in my shower so I can learn about being more productive and... It's possible in a way it never was before in the history of the world to banish solitude and quiet from your existence! From the moment you wake up until the moment you fall asleep with your phone in your hand.

2007 twitter, South by Southwest, it took off like wildfire. 2007 was also when Facebook opened up from just being a college website to being anybody that had an email address. All of a sudden infinity's in our pocket. We can communicate with everybody all the time. In 2007 the world changed but we didn't know it, we didn't know it would bring us to a place where there's no longer any free moments to think, no longer any quiet spots to ponder, we didn't know. So, let's acknowledge that if we've made a mess of things it's because we didn't know.

But come on, what did Jesus say, "It's possible to gain the whole worldwide web, but lose your soul." One translation says you can lose touch with your very self. That's what happens. We lose touch with who? Ourselves! In our always connected world, we lose who we are!

What are we giving up when we give up quiet? What are we giving up when we give up being solitary for a few moments. Not like the card game. But quiet, solitude, these are the things that have been lost in our nonstop input, social media, 24/7 news culture. What are we giving up?

Barnes and Noble reported a 26% year-over-year increase in demand for books on anxiety and depression. According to the American Psychological Association, teenagers in North America today are living with levels of anxiety that were normative in psychiatric patients in the 1950's. As a society we have a smoldering sense of anxiety.

And we are bored! We're bored and we're listless. Why? Not because there's nothing to do, but because there's too much to do! We're bored because we don't ever allow ourselves to get bored. Right? The moment it's still, we turn some music on. The moment it's still we start checking social or texting friends. In what used to be calm, still moments now we just doom scroll because we are so bored and listless, we are so tired and drained...

SO, let's acknowledge the world we are living in today but let's also draw a line in the sand and say, "I don't want 24/7 news coming into my head! I don't want nonstop podcasts coming into my head! I don't want input after input after input, scroll, scroll, scroll, TV blaring in the background, laptop open to Netflix, scroll, scroll, scroll... I don't want infinity! No! I'm gonna quietly read some books. I'm gonna go for some walks in the woods and leave my phone behind. I'm gonna have coffee with some real people. I'm gonna let myself be bored and learn something like woodworking or sowing. I'm gonna make my own wilderness! Man-made wilderness! I'm gonna choose to follow Jesus into the wilderness!

SO, I've got three takeaways I want to give you and we will be done. When you create wilderness for yourself, do so in motion, do so in nature, and do so in silence. Three intentional things, let's start with:

In motion.

How did Jesus get from His baptism at the river to this wilderness area in between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea? Answer... He walked! And that was a part of the process. It was part of the process of Him slowing

down and calming His soul. It was literally what the Bible talks about throughout as an analogy for our relationship with God. It's walking. Walking with God.

When you walk your arms swing, when you walk your breathing gets deeper, when you walk your heart begins to pump harder and blood flow increases. Even a ten-minute walk they say can improve your overall health and wellbeing.

Eugene Peterson, this incredible man of God who gave us the Message translation of the Bible, after his passing a few years ago they were combing through his library and found extracts of some of his sermons that he had preached but that were never before published. They compiled them into a book called "A Month of Sundays" and I love this one thing he said so much. He said:

The virtual elimination of walking by the automobile has more than physical consequences, for it also diminishes spiritual perceptions. We get places faster, but we experience less." Eugene Peterson

How are we going to create "Man-Made Wilderness?" We are going to do it in motion! I'm talking about finding time in your life for a moment of solitude, a moment to go walk somewhere. A moment away from the noise and hustle and bustle and technology to just breathe deeply and notice the world around us and listen to the birds sing or the neighborhood cat that hangs out by those bushes. This is ME time!

One of the things I started doing about 4-months ago now was I cancelled my gym membership because I might have been getting the health benefits of working out, but the place was just noise and TV screens and loud music, and everything was plastic and rubber and metal. It was good for me physically but terrible for my soul. So, I cancelled it and found a trail that I hike for 45 minutes a day. I don't have music on, I put my phone on do not disturb, and I walk for about 4 miles a day. I look up and notice the wind blowing through the trees. I listen to the birds. I talk to God. I listen to God. And my mind comes alive!

Henry David Thoreau said, look at this:

"Whenever my legs begin to move, my thoughts begin to flow." Henry David Thoreau

So many great leaders throughout history were known for walking. Dwight D Eisenhower would take walks alone and on one of these walks is where he came up with the idea for the D-Day invasion. Steve Jobs was prolific for his walking. He would have walking business meetings! He would have people meet him and they would just go walk around Palo Alto. That was where the ideas, the juices began to flow.

But let me give you some advice! Pro tip time. No air pods, put your phone on airplane mode or even better yet, leave it behind! This isn't a time to get caught up on your true crime podcast or listen to music. Why? Because there is no way you will learn to hear the voice of God unless you learn to get comfortable in silence. God is not in the noise, but He is in the whispers.

Sometimes I just walk and say Jesus and that's enough. Sometimes I have a running dialogue. But no matter what there's the space to breathe. Sometimes it moves me to tears when He whispers. Sometimes my heart wants to dance. Sometimes I just work out all my built-up tension and anxiety. But I always come back different than I came. Sometimes in big ways, often in small ways. But find your time like Jesus did and do it in motion. Take walks.

So, in motion and now:

In nature.

We don't know the exact location where Jesus got away to for 40 days, but tradition holds it was the Mount of Temptation which is located about 5 miles outside of Jericho. Today it looks like this:

[PICTURE]

The summit of the mountain there is about 1,200 feet above sea level, and it offers a spectacular panoramic view of the Jordan Valley, the Dead Sea and the mountains of Moab and Gilead. I can understand why Jesus would go to a beautiful place to face this temptation.

Sir John Lubbock once said, "Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass under trees on a summer's day, listening to the murmur of the water, or watching the clouds float across the sky, is by no means a waste of time."

The old hymn, "This Is My Father's World" has a verse that says: This is my father's world. He shines in all that's fair. In the rustling grass, I hear him pass. He speaks to me everywhere.

Our God is a personal God. He has proved that. He came to earth as a person, lived as a person, died as a person, and he inhabits our person through His Holy Spirit. SO, it's not a jump to think that He can use His creation to speak personally to each one of us.

AND much of the way God communicates through nature is nonverbal. It goes straight to your heart: a sunset, a budding leaf, a shooting star. God wired us to communicate nonverbally as well as verbally. We rely on visual cues to understand one another: a shrug, a smile, a hug... sometimes words aren't needed. SO, what if we opened our eyes to notice God's nonverbal communication through nature? What if we went for a walk in nature and prayerfully asked God to speak to us, and He showed us something special, noteworthy, or beautiful?

But did you notice that not only was Jesus in nature, but He was also with animals. This is a practical and simple thing. Foster intentional time with animals. Play with your dog or cat. Go to the zoo. Go birdwatching. Our first assignment was to hang out with and give names to animals. God knows we need time with them.

Winston Churchill said, "*There is something about the outside of a horse that is good for the inside of a man.*" We know today the truth of that statement as science proves that animals are healing in therapy and recovery situations. There's something calming about it.

So, in motion, in nature and lastly:

In silence.

No matter what you think of this message or do with this message the key is that we want to minimize inputs. I'm all for reading the Bible. Duh! I'm all for worship music. Duh! But it's vitally important to have times when there's no input coming in and you sit in silence.

Now, this is gonna freak you out at first if you haven't done it. It's weird. Right? Why? Because a lot of us are like Anne Lamott. She said:

"My mind's like a bad neighborhood, I try not to go in there alone."

locusts and honey. He didn't care about what you thought of him, or anybody thought of him! How did he get groomed for greatness? Because he just showed up one day out of nowhere. Well, Luke's gospel tells us, chapter 1, verse 80:

**And John grew up and became strong in spirit. He lived [Where?] in the WILDERNESS,
outside the cities, until the day came for him to step into the public eye in Israel.**

Do you know what the problem is with our socially connected always on generation today? We're all trying to be in the public eye without first going to the wilderness!

You get the idea. From the Book of Genesis to today, when God wants to make a man, when He wants to make a woman, He makes that person in the wilderness. Man... made... wilderness. God did form Adam and Eve in the chaos of the city. He chose to do it in the solitude, in the beauty, in the perfection of a garden. AND He's still doing it today!

Sermon in a sentence:

You can't have a quiet soul without quiet time.

So, let's fight for quiet time in our lives. In Jesus' name!

[PRAYER TIME]