

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

August 3, 2025 Surviving in the wilderness. We are all wandering

I Intro.

It's the end of summer break. The time has flown by. Many of our ministries and activities have started back up. And there will be more to come. So, stay connected to our social media to keep up with everything that's happening. We're glad you've chosen to join us as we move through 2025. Welcome to our companion devotional to Sunday's message. It's just a part of all we have to offer to you. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey. We don't want you to miss out on anything. We consider you part of our community. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know.

II Sunday.

I'm going to start off with a quick question. **Have you ever been on a road trip and you got lost?** You may have just tried to figure out how to navigate a place you've never been before. Or you were forced to take a detour and you ended up not knowing where you were. The more you thought you were going the right way, trying to figure out how to get back to where you were, the worse it got. There is no line you crossed to go from unlost to lost. It's; real familiar, to; *"hmm not so sure"*, to; *"I think we're lost"*, to; *"oh dang we're really lost, and I don't know what to do"*. In that last place, everything you once did you have to throw away and start over. Here are the feelings that came from getting off track. Uncertainty. Disorientation. A type of panic sets in because not only do you not know where you are, but you're becoming more lost and further away from what you want to be.

Premise for this series: "Surviving in the wilderness". If you have ever found yourself in a season of disconnection, lostness, trying to get your bearings. You feel lost, uncertain, disoriented, and not sure what to do. It's called 'The Wilderness'. And it feels like wandering around looking for something familiar or meaningful that would help you get back on course. **Have you ever felt that way?**

Some understandings that will frame our conversation for this series.

1. Wandering in the wilderness is a season of change. There are going to be times in your life you find yourself no longer on the path you had planned, or thought you were on. All the things you had planned, expectations, hopes, dreams, and more all get thrown to the side...at least for that moment. You just feel disoriented. The plans, ideas, path you were on aren't working, or available anymore. You don't know if you should try to keep going on the same path, or switch to something new. Wandering in the wilderness is a disruption of life as we were experiencing it or had planned.

2. Wandering in the wilderness is a loss of your identity. Who you once were. The experiences that made you who you are, got you where you are, will need to be revisited, reordered, and revised. This season is an invitation to discover who you will become. It's disruptive and scary. And an

important unavoidable journey. '*Wandering in the wilderness*' is an important event in which many cultures create this experience as a rite of passage. Many native cultures have a 'walkabout' ritual in the wilderness to become an adult. This is moving you from one phase of who you are to another.

3. Wandering in the wilderness is cultivating an openness to 'new'. I want to give it a little more specific definition for you to hold, while we go through this idea of 'wandering'. Wandering is not a literal or physical change in our world. Wandering is about transition. Maybe a sense of disorientation around beliefs, values, your faith. Or it could be specific plans, dreams, hopes, aspirations, etc. Wandering is a sense of being unmoored...from the familiar. What you thought was true, trustworthy, certain about, is stripped away. The key is while you are in the wilderness...your life will be different. So, you will have to do different things, trust different things. Let go of the way you used to do things, life, and entertain new ideas, ways of seeing things. And incorporate new practices and expectations into your life.

It is in this felt place of wandering in the wilderness, a place of disorientation and uncertainty, **we want to help you to still find sacredness and a way to restore and reorder your world to make it out of the wilderness.**

III Scripture. In this series, we will address tendencies people resort to, and things we experience in our wandering in the wilderness. We're going to pull truths and wisdom from the Exodus account of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness from Egypt to the Promised Land. And we hope to give you real life, practical things, from God, that can help you navigate when you not just 'feel' lost. Your GPS is telling you one thing. But it doesn't feel right or trustworthy anymore. We want to give you some truths to help you build a new GPS.

Truths about the wilderness and wandering.

These will be from the story of the Israelites in their journey in the wilderness.

1. Wandering in the wilderness is just a part of life. It's just the way the world is.

Deuteronomy 8:2-3. Remember how the LORD your God led you through the wilderness for these forty years, humbling you and testing you to prove your character, and to find out whether or not you would obey his commands. Yes, he humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with manna, a food previously unknown to you and your ancestors. He did it to teach you that people do not live by bread alone; rather, we live by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

Wilderness is a place of disorder and uncertainty. We're in a new place we're not familiar with. And all the old ways of doing things don't work anymore. So much so, that the purpose of the wilderness was a journey to purge the Israelites from the old ways in order to install new ways. It's like Basic training. Wandering in the wilderness is a natural part of life that will constantly do the work of pressing the old out of us, to make room for the new. This isn't a punishment or consequences of poor behavior. It's just a natural cycle, the rhythm of life.

2. Find YOUR way to see God while you're wandering in the wilderness. Before the wilderness, we always experienced, understood God one way. Entering into the wilderness forces us to find new ways to be with God. Wandering in the wilderness we trust and look for the truth that God will provide a way for you to find him in a new and different way.

Exodus 13:21. The LORD went ahead of them. He guided them during the day with a pillar of cloud, and he provided light at night with a pillar of fire. This allowed them to travel by day or by night.

This was a new way for the Israelites to 'be with' God. And developing new ways and practices of experiencing God regularly will guide us if we learn to trust in this new way.

3. Trust and embrace that while wandering in the wilderness you have to be open to new experiences. This will be learning to let go of old ways, and being open to new ways. Not only will we experience God in new ways, but we will learn to be sustained by God in new ways.

Deuteronomy 8:3. Yes, he humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with manna, a food previously unknown to you and your ancestors. He did it to teach you that people do not live by bread alone; rather, we live by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

In those new ways of being sustained, we will need to build within us a desire to learn new truths to learn within those new ways. Before we began wandering in the wilderness, we were used to specific ways in how we understood and believed God would provide for us. Israelites were not taken care of well in captivity, but it was predictable. And there was comfort in that. And we see people who in their wilderness revert back to more comfortable and familiar ways of experiencing God. The Israelites were having to learn life won't be the same, and that requires an openness to experience God in new ways. Wandering in the wilderness we learn to receive and live on the daily grace of God.

4. Have a scripturally based code to hold onto as you pass through your wandering in the wilderness. Because the wilderness can be so disorienting and we are feeling unmoored, we will need to make sure we have something we can attach ourselves to.

Exodus 20:2 "I am the LORD your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery.

After God says this, he gives the Israelites the Ten Commandments as a way to be moored in the midst of wandering. This was a covenant between God and the people he rescued, to give them something tangible to adhere to, when everything felt disordered. I sincerely believe this is why Jesus gave us the two greatest commandments (His commandments). To hold us, anchor us, when we're in the wilderness. These are vows you make to hold you in place when you're not feeling it. I don't need rules or laws to tell me how to be a good partner. That grows out of a relationship and wanting the relationship to thrive. But there are times that I may not be feeling it, and vows, a code, holds me in place when my commitment is lacking or I'm struggling. Marriage vows aren't for when everything is great. They're for when they're not. When you're wandering in the wilderness, you need a set of values, beliefs, a code that you can refer to when nothing else feels solid. Because of the loss of identity, these will remind you who you belong to. Israelites WERE slaves. They were comfortable with being slaves. The wilderness was to let them know they were more than that. A set of beliefs, values, will continually turn you back to your true identity.

5. While you're wandering in the wilderness, have a portable practice to experience the presence of God. I'm not saying don't establish a dedicated space to meet with God. I want to encourage you to establish a designated place to meet God. In Exodus 25 are the instructions

for a tabernacle. This is an intentional practice you design to be with God. Because one of the greatest struggles of wandering in the wilderness is losing who we once were. I used to be this, believe this, do this, was called this. The loss of a partner, child, parent, job, position, changed that. Being in the wilderness is a crisis of identity. God is inviting you into a new practice to reconsider, reorder what you once held onto. Being in the wilderness may push us to question, have doubts, about things we thought were once solid. That is a good thing, necessary for growth, and also scary. The wilderness leads to a deeper, more profound faith...not just an inherited one.

But be careful of your practice becoming sacred (the only way to meet God) rather than the meeting with God. God instructed the Israelites to build the tabernacle. A place to meet with God. Tabernacle was a verb, “to tabernacle”. It was an action and a practice. You need a regular, most likely new, practice to remind you who you are. And in that practice, you will ‘tabernacle’ with God.

6. Continually remember wandering in the wilderness is a normal, and a necessary part of life. You’re going to be okay. Remember, wandering in the wilderness is not a punishment. It’s a process.

Return to **Deuteronomy 8:2-3 Remember how the LORD your God led you through the wilderness for these forty years, humbling you and testing you to prove your character, and to find out whether or not you would obey his commands. 3 Yes, he humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with manna, a food previously unknown to you and your ancestors. He did it to teach you that people do not live by bread alone; rather, we live by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.**

There is the potential for great growth, increased wisdom, and deeper faith. A strengthening of who you are and your relationship with God through your ‘wandering’.

III Challenge.

Wandering in the wilderness is not a punishment. It’s a process. To move us from one place, where we were, but don’t need to be anymore, to a new place that you may have never been to before. It’s disruptive and disorienting. You are literally being displaced. But moving through your wilderness is an invitation to rebirth.

For the time of wandering you are living in the “in-between”. You’re not where you were, and you’re not where you’re going to be. Incorporate into your daily life the things God gave the Israelites to help them through their wandering in the wilderness. And you will discover you can make it to the other side. Wherever God is leading you, you will become stronger, wiser, a deeper faith, more resilient, than you were before. Your ‘new and improved’ you.

Wandering is hard. Probably the hardest thing you’ll ever go through. But there is good work being done, IF you put these practices in place, grow the ability to handle some good friction in life, you will not only get to where God is leading you. And you will be much further along in becoming the person God is growing you to be. And I can assure you, God will get you back on a new path.

What do you need or have you learned from your wandering in the wilderness?