

## **Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.**

**August 31, 2025 Surviving in the wilderness. You can see the end but can't seem to get there.**

### **I Intro.**

We're back to a full service, and finishing this series. Also, many of our ministries and activities have started back up. You'll see more and more opportunities for you to participate in the life of NCC. 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 Recap.**

There are times in our lives we feel lost, uncertain, disoriented, and not sure what we should do. It's a life interrupting season of change, transition, loss of identity. We call this 'The Wilderness'. It often feels like we are wandering looking for something familiar or meaningful that would help us get back on course. In the wilderness we have to be open to new ways to see God and new experiences. 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 hope and sacredness. A way to restore and reorder your world to make it out of the wilderness. And to discover who you will become as you move through the wilderness.

### **III Sunday.**

Janet and I love watching Netflix series. But we want any series to tie up loose ends, and finish storylines. Even if everything isn't resolved perfectly neatly, and they do that slight introduction of a possible next storyline, we're good. We just don't want hanging stories. This is so important to us, we tend to not commit to a series unless we know it's an intentionally designed mini-series, or we know the next season has already been green lit. **Are you like that?**

Our brains are designed for closure, resolution. Something inside of us knows something is wrong when a thing is not finished. We don't like being in the middle of something, and then staying stuck in it. We're just drawn to neatly tied up, finished things.

**But that's not how the world works is it? What happens when there is no clean and tight ending? What happens when things are left unresolved?**

**What is your default reaction when you see no end in sight?** You're in your wilderness. You can see some resolution, or know what the other side of the wilderness might be. But you can't get there. This is what living in the wilderness is like. We may not know exactly how things should end, be wrapped up, or where we should eventually end up. Or even who we will become. But we know where we are is not where we want to be. So, we live in a constant state of things being unresolved. **What do we do with that?**

We're in our final conversation in our series; *"Surviving the wilderness"*. **What do we do when we're still in the middle of our wilderness?** This is the work of being in the wilderness, and making the best of it. Some practical tools, skills we can grow to help us live well in that 'in between' time. I tried to find one all inclusive scripture passage that would give us this concentrated truth to help us when we can see the end and can't get there. How to survive while in the middle of the wilderness, waiting to get out. I flipped through the Exodus story...several times. Used three different AI platforms. Looked at several different commentaries. Know what I found? There's no ONE all inclusive scripture that talks about how to hang in there when you can't seem to get out of the wilderness.

**Want to know why there isn't?**

BECAUSE THERE IS NO EASY ONE SIMPLE TRUTH TO HELP US WHEN WE CAN'T GET TO THE OTHER SIDE OF OUR WILDERNESS.

Going to do is give you snippets of truths from the Exodus account to help us. Then some practical ways to help us be in our wilderness.

**A. Scriptural truth. There is only one.**

**Trust daily in God. All the time.** Here's what it looks like specifically.

**1. The wilderness will last until we've learned what we're supposed to learn.** Big truth- The wilderness isn't always a place. It's often how we handle being in that place. The greatest thing you can do in the wilderness is condition yourself to look for things to learn.

**Exodus 13:17-18** When Pharaoh finally let the people go, God did not lead them along the main road that runs through Philistine territory, even though that was the shortest route to the Promised Land. God said, **"If the people are faced with a battle, they might change their minds and return to Egypt."** So God led them in a roundabout way through the wilderness toward the Red Sea. Thus the Israelites left Egypt like an army ready for battle.

God was saying the people weren't prepared, ready, to move to their next place. So, the wilderness was to teach them things to make them ready. There are things about being in the wilderness beyond our understanding. You will have an endless number of questions there aren't answers to. We lean into and trust our relationship with God, that he will guide us in all wisdom and knowledge to move through a really tough wilderness in the best way possible. Continually ask; **"What is God trying to teach me in this wilderness?"**

**2. Grow the ability to live in 'enough'.** We live in a society that is grounded in peddling false scarcity, and then constantly trying to tell you that you need 'more'. (Tension between those two)

**Exodus 16:16-18** These are the LORD's instructions: **Each household should gather as much as it needs. Pick up two quarts for each person in your tent."** So the people of Israel did as they were told. Some gathered a lot, some only a little. But when they measured it out, **everyone had just enough. Those who gathered a lot had nothing left over, and those who gathered only a little had enough. Each family had just what it needed.**

The key phrase; *"Each family had just what it needed"*. Being in the wilderness will rise up with us; anxiety, fear, stress, and possible panic. There is never enough when we are anxious. Never enough locks on the door, guns, money in our bank, food in our pantry and more. A great work in the wilderness is teaching us to trust in 'enough'. This is the message of Mary Poppins. *"Enough is as good as a feast"*. In your wilderness learn to feast on 'enough'.

**3. Learn the difference between wants and needs.** In **Exodus 17:1-7** we see the story of Moses hitting the rock to get water because the people were complaining about being thirsty. You will feel scarcity in the wilderness. You will desperately want and feel the need for specific things. You'll feel this, but we don't always stop and analyze it. There is important 'gleaning' work of separating what you really need, from the wants that disguise themselves as needs. Moments where you may not get what you want, but you will eventually get what you need. (Mick Jagger) Doing this well will help you get through the wilderness quicker, less stressed and wiser.

**4. There is a purpose in the wilderness.** This is a passage we've used over and over in this series. The 'Work of the wilderness'. To teach you things you don't know.

**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.

This has been a guiding passage for this entire series. It reveals to us the nature of the wilderness. And it's the work we need to do in our wilderness. Goes back to what we just said earlier: Trust daily in God. All the time. Look for the things we can learn while we're in our wilderness.

**B. Practices we can incorporate into our lives.** (Practical applications)

**1. Practice daily grounding.** Start the day with God first...not only as most important, but chronologically first. When you get in in the morning pray this; *"Give me what I need for today. No more or no less"*. Maybe at the end of the day review where God met you. This is your centering practice while in your wilderness.

**2. Name and grieve what you've left behind.** A big truth: You can't heal from what you won't name. The wilderness is always a time of loss. Of familiarity, beliefs, dreams, comfort, future. Do the hard work of actively grieving what you've lost. Fight the urge to ignore loss, or try to go back to the way things 'used to be'. The best way to do that is to name it, grieve it, and let it go.

**3. Hold loosely to expectations.** Be open to the divinely unique movement of God in each moment. This is living open-handed to whatever God is choosing to do. It's embracing the mystery of God. Most of us want certainty in our lives. We want clearly drawn and understood lines and expectations. We tend to use the ones we've always used...because they've worked...or at least used to. Now we have to let those former ones go, and as we move forward. Expectations we have about the other side of the wilderness may not be reality. The Promised Land was not Disney World. And Disney is NOT the happiest place on earth. Read Joshua and Judges. As you see the other side of the wilderness, build within yourself an honest set of expectations for the other side.

**4. Stay in community.** In the wilderness there is an unhealthy draw towards isolation. We must build relationships with people who are looking for the same things we are. Your wildernesses may not be the same as others, but you will be experiencing similar things. Find strength and hope from others.

**5. Continually remember God's presence.** (Sacred memory) Remembering is such an important gift to continually return to. **What were past wilderness stories? How did God lead you through those?** You've been through the wilderness before. You made it through. You'll make it through this one, and the next one, and so on.

**6. Worship in the midst of uncertainty.** Worship (in a variety of ways) is an active resistance to despair. Not faking it till you make it. It's intentionally making and finding moments to be with God. Just being in his presence. Finding things to remind you of your smallness, but also your significance.

**7. Serve right where you are.** Take the focus off yourself, and practice radical generosity. In the midst of your wilderness find someone else who is struggling in their wilderness. Do this at your work, neighborhood, friend group, etc. Be open to promptings from God to focus outward.

#### **IV Challenge.**

I hope this series was helpful. Whether you're in a wilderness now, just came out of one, or you're heading into one. We confess that wandering in the wilderness is hard, disorienting. The wilderness strips away our feeling of familiarity, certainty, who we are. We're left with what feels like nothing helpful. But it's a normal process of life. We can make it an experience that grows a lot of good within us. We learn to make the best of a really tough time, season, in our life.

#### **Here is a poem we read together in worship.**

*God of the in-between,  
When we can't see the end,  
Let us see the manna.  
When we can't rush the journey,  
Teach us to trust the Provider.  
When we long for certainty,  
Feed us with enough for this moment.  
And when we feel forgotten in the wilderness,  
Remind us: you never leave,  
You walk beside us,  
Cloud by day, fire by night,  
Grace, one step at a time.*

**Remember these forever truths.** You may be in a really tough wilderness. But...

**"You are not alone."**

**"This is not the end."**

**"You've got this."**