

# Small Group Guide: The Bitter Waters of Marah

**Sermon Series: Wilderness Journey**

**Text: Exodus 15:22-27**

## Opening Prayer

Begin your time together by asking God to open hearts and minds to what He wants to teach through this study. Pray for vulnerability and honesty as you discuss life's bitter waters together.

## Ice Breaker (10 minutes)

Share about a time when something you were excited about didn't turn out the way you expected. How did you respond in that moment?

## Sermon Recap (5 minutes)

The Israelites traveled three days into the wilderness to worship God, only to find bitter water they couldn't drink at Marah. Instead of crying out to God, they complained to Moses. God instructed Moses to throw a tree into the water, making it sweet—a picture of applying the cross to our bitter circumstances. God then led them to Elim, a place of rest with 12 springs and 70 palm trees.

## Key Takeaways

### 1. Bitter circumstances are part of the journey

- Trials come early and often in our faith walk
- God uses difficulties to reveal what's in our hearts
- Testing refines us like gold in fire

### 2. The cross is God's answer to bitterness

- The tree thrown into the water represents Christ's cross

- We must apply our circumstances to the cross
- God's grace is sufficient in our weakness

### 3. Cry out to God, not to people

- Complaining to others doesn't bring solutions
- Prayer with thanksgiving guards our hearts and minds
- God provides wisdom generously when we ask

## Discussion Questions

### Understanding the Text (15 minutes)

1. **The Israelites had just witnessed the miracle of the Red Sea crossing. Why do you think they forgot so quickly and complained instead of praying?** What does this reveal about human nature?
2. **Read Exodus 15:26.** What conditions does God give for being their healer? What's the difference between "earnestly heeding" and "giving ear to His commandments"?
3. **Why do you think God led them to bitter water instead of directly to Elim with its 12 springs?** What was He trying to teach them?

### Personal Reflection (20 minutes)

4. **The sermon stated: "If I know my Father, I know my Father has good plans." Do you truly believe this in your current circumstances?** What makes it difficult to believe when facing bitter waters?
5. **Think about a current "bitter water" situation in your life. Have you been complaining to people or crying out to God?** What's the difference in your experience when you do one versus the other?
6. **The pastor said, "Stop asking WHY and start asking WHAT."** How might this shift in perspective change how you approach your current trials? What might God be trying to show you?
7. **Read 2 Corinthians 12:9 and 1 Peter 5:10.** How have you seen God's power perfected in your weakness? Share a testimony of growth through difficulty.

### Going Deeper (15 minutes)

8. **The sermon emphasized that "our life is a form of worship—not just raising hands and singing."** What does sacrificial worship look

like in your daily life? Where might you have "idols" you're unaware of?

9. **Moses threw the tree (representing the cross) into the bitter water. What does it practically mean to "apply the cross" to your bitter circumstances?** Give specific examples.
10. **After the test at Marah, God led them to Elim for rest. Why is rest important in the wilderness journey?** How do you recognize when God is providing you a season of rest?

## **Practical Application**

### **This Week's Challenge:**

Choose ONE of the following to practice this week:

#### **Option 1: The Gratitude Discipline**

When you face a frustrating or bitter situation this week, immediately stop and thank God for three things before asking for anything. Journal about how this changes your perspective.

#### **Option 2: The "What" Prayer**

Instead of asking "Why is this happening?" pray "God, what are You trying to show me?" each day. Write down any insights you receive.

#### **Option 3: Cry Out Session**

Set aside 30 minutes alone with God to honestly cry out about your bitter waters—not complaining, but genuinely bringing your heart before Him. Be specific about your struggles and ask for His wisdom.

#### **Option 4: Cross Application**

Identify one specific "bitter water" in your life. Research Scripture promises related to that situation and literally write them on paper. Then "throw" them into your situation by praying those promises over it daily.

## **Memory Verse**

### **Philippians 4:6-7**

*"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with*

*thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."*

## **Prayer Time (15 minutes)**

### **Guided Prayer Prompts:**

1. **Confession:** Confess areas where you've been complaining instead of praying, or where you've doubted God's good plans.
2. **Petition:** Share your "bitter waters" with the group and pray specifically for wisdom (James 1:5) and for God to reveal what He's teaching through the trial.
3. **Thanksgiving:** Thank God for past trials that produced growth, and by faith thank Him for what He's doing in current circumstances even when you can't see it.
4. **Intercession:** Pray for group members' specific wilderness journeys and that they would persevere with faith.

### **Before Next Week**

- Read Exodus 16 (the story of manna) in preparation for next week's discussion
- Practice your chosen application challenge
- Check in with one group member mid-week to encourage them in their wilderness journey

### **Leader Notes**

- **Be prepared** for emotional responses when discussing bitter circumstances. Some group members may be in very difficult seasons.
- **Create safety** by being vulnerable yourself about your own wilderness experiences.
- **Don't rush** through the prayer time—this may be the most important part of the evening.
- **Follow up** during the week with anyone who shared something particularly heavy.

- **Celebrate testimonies** of past wilderness victories to build faith for current trials.