

Forty Days in the Wilderness

“Preparation”

February 22-23

Introduction/Recap

Aloha, everyone and welcome back to, *Forty Days in the Wilderness*. I'm Mark, and I'm so excited you're here. Over these six weeks, we're learning how to navigate life's dry and difficult seasons—and more importantly, how to discover God's purpose in them.

Last week, we tackled a big truth: the wilderness isn't a place of punishment or abandonment. It's a place of preparation and transformation. As John Bevere puts it, the wilderness is a necessary time, a season in the life of every child of God, and our understanding of this time or season is imperative.

But here's the challenge—when we don't understand the “why” behind our wilderness, we don't just miss out on the growth God has for us, but we start growing in the opposite direction! Just look at the Israelites! Instead of stepping into transformation, they spiraled into complaining, fear, and rebellion.

So today, we're going deeper. If the wilderness is preparation, then what exactly is God preparing us for? And how do we make the most of it?

Preparation in the Wilderness

Luke always dreamed of escaping the monotony of life on his uncle's farm. I don't expect you to remember this story. It happened a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away. His big break to become an ace pilot was short-lived when he found himself crash-landed in the middle of a swamp. Instead of saving his friends, he was knee-deep in mud. The ship he arrived in was all but completely sunk. And instead of finding a great warrior to train him, he was stuck with this strange, green, rambling little hermit. This was not the adventure he had imagined! Had he really just left behind everything just to be stuck in the mud?

Ella's life was once filled with light and laughter. Her father's home was a place where she was loved and cherished— a real princess. But after his death everything changed and she became a slave in her own home. Constantly covered in ashes and cinder, her stepsisters took to calling her Cinderella. Day after day she toiled, tending to the endless needs of others and caring for the hapless creatures who roamed the halls. Was this all that was left for her? Had she been abandoned to a life of servitude, or was there something beyond the ashes waiting for her?

Daniel thought he was signing up to learn how to fend off bullies. But instead of a dojo, he found himself in an old man's backyard. Instead of kicks and punches he found himself stuck waxing cars, sanding floors, and painting fences. Day after day, he worked, growing more and more frustrated. This wasn't training — it was child labor! Was this all a joke? Had he put his trust in the wrong teacher? When would he finally learn something useful?

If you're familiar with any one of these stories, then you already know something these characters did not — this chapter is not the end of their story. In fact, this was actually the part of the story that transformed them into the people they needed to become.

But we can't fault them for not seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. It is extremely difficult to find purpose in your pain when you're stuck in the middle of it. Usually, that kind of perspective comes from hindsight. But what if we could go *into* our wilderness season with a clear vision of what it would prepare us for?

Prepared for What?

Last week we defined WHAT the wilderness is. The wilderness is a season of testing, preparation and transformation. It is not a place of rejection, abandonment, or punishment. So now that we know the WHAT we need to understand the WHY. Why the testing? Why the preparation? Why do I need to transform? Why can't I just come to Jesus and stay the way I am? Luke Skywalker emerged from his wilderness a Jedi Knight, Daniel San a Karate Kid. What does God use our wilderness to shape us into?

In order to answer that question we have to take a quick trip back to our first series of the year, *Hale Pule* where we saw God's original intent for humanity in Genesis 1,

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*"So God created mankind in His own image,
in the image of God He created them;
male and female He created them.*

28 *God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground," (Genesis 1:27-28).*

God's original intent for mankind was to reflect His image to creation and to rule with Him over it. Mankind royally botched this plan by choosing to reflect our own will and impose our own rule over creation but God is still seeking those who will fulfill His original intent. Will you be one of those people?

Probation

Imagine you're applying for your dream job. This company is amazing— it's the kind of place where people are dying to work. The salary is great, the benefits are next level, and the mission of the company aligns perfectly with your values. Now, imagine you walk into the interview, and the hiring manager looks at your resume. After a long pause, they say,

"You know what? We really like you. You seem like a great person. How about we just hand you the keys to the company? No training, no experience necessary—just go ahead and start making big decisions on day one."

Sounds crazy, right? No company would ever do that! If you want to manage something valuable, you have to prove yourself first. You have to go through training. You have to be tested.

This is exactly what God does with us. He's not just looking for people who can show up to church, pray occasionally, and be generally good people. He's looking for people He can trust —people He can entrust with His mission, His authority, and even His kingdom. And just like any good boss, God puts His future managers through a process.

He gives us **tests** to reveal our character.

He gives us **assignments** to develop our faithfulness.

He gives us **wilderness seasons** to see how we respond under pressure.

This isn't punishment—this is preparation. The same way a business wouldn't put someone in charge of millions of dollars without testing them first, God isn't going to put you in charge of something eternal until He knows you're ready.

In fact, Jesus tells us this directly:

“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much,” (Luke 16:10).

If we can't be faithful with what's right in front of us—our families, our jobs, our time, our integrity—then how can we expect God to trust us with more?

The wilderness is your probation period. It's your training ground. It's the place where God is seeing what kind of manager you'll be in His kingdom—not just in the life to come, but right now.

Testing The Israelites

This is exactly what God did with the Israelites in their wilderness. He wasn't trying to punish them, He was trying to prepare them for the Promised Land. They were called to be a people who reflected God's nature to the nations. But in order to do that they would have to trust and depend on God.

So God brought them to their first test. We read about it last week in Exodus 15 — the test of the bitter water at Marah. God was trying to teach His people dependence but instead they grumbled against Him. A perfect example of God trying to develop trust among His people comes in the very next chapter with the test of food. God provided supernatural food for His people in the wilderness but He gave them very specific instructions on how and when to gather it.

17 “The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. 18 And when they measured it by the omer, the one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little. Everyone had gathered just as much as they needed,”
(Exodus 16:17-18).

The lesson here is that it is not you who provides for yourself. God provides and He provides exactly what you need when you need it. Check. Let's move on to the next phase of the test.

19 Then Moses said to them, “No one is to keep any of it until morning,” (Exodus 16:19).

It's one thing for God to provide today. But can we trust that He will provide again tomorrow or will we try to take matters into our own hands?

20 “However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them,” (Exodus 16:20).

Ok, we failed that one but let's try again.

21 Each morning everyone gathered as much as they needed, and when the sun grew hot, it melted away. 22 On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much—two omers for each person—and the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses. 23 He said to them, “This is what the Lord commanded: ‘Tomorrow is to be a day of sabbath rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.’”

24 So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. 25 “Eat it today,” Moses said, “because today is a sabbath to the Lord. You will not find any of it on the ground today. 26 Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any,” (Exodus 16:24-26).

So the people were instructed not to save any until the next day *until* day 6 because the next day was the sabbath and they were not to work. Miraculously, the same food that would rot if saved no longer rotted on the sabbath! Just as God said! Things are going well!

27 Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. 28 Then the Lord said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep My commands and My instructions? 29 Bear in mind that the Lord has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day He gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where they are on the seventh day; no one is to go out.” 30 So the people rested on the seventh day,” (Exodus 16:27-30).

What is God doing? Is He toying with the people? Is He playing little mind games with them? No! He’s using this series of tests to teach His people a very valuable lesson — to trust Him! Why is God so determined to help His people pass this test? The reason is because He knows a bigger test is coming, one that will determine the rest of their lives. God continues to test His people, trying again and again to gain their trust. Again and again they fail. But little do they know, their time is running out. The time for quizzes is nearly over, next is the final exam. They haven’t passed a single quiz so the outcome doesn’t look good.

Testing day arrives. The semester is nearly over. Only one final test stands between the people and the promise land. The subject matter is the same it’s always been — trusting God. But the stakes are much higher this time. This test is pass or fail. The test is simple, will they trust that God will fight their battles against the giants in the promise land or not? The same ones who have failed every quiz begin to poison the minds of the people. Out of the 12 spies who scouted the land, only 2 put their faith in God. 2 out of 12 (approximately 17%) That’s an F. The people would have to repeat the entire semester until the next generation could take the test again.

All of Life is a Wilderness

The truth is, while we may go through intensified wilderness seasons, all of life is a wilderness. From the day we are delivered from slavery in Egypt we become sojourners passing through this life. Every choice, every action, every decision is a test that either shapes us more into the image of Christ and in alignment with His will or further away. If you’re not sure you’ve been passing God’s tests, don’t fret. We want to equip you to recognize each test and pass with flying colors. With the time we have left I want to give you a sneak peek at the different ways God prepares us in the wilderness.

PERSONHOOD

Next week, Pastor Theresa will unpack how God uses the wilderness to reshape our very identity. You’ve heard the saying, “God got His people out of Egypt, but could He get Egypt out of them?” It’s one thing to walk out of bondage—it’s another to stop thinking like a slave. The Israelites had spent generations as captives, and now, in the wilderness, God was transforming them from slaves into sons. In the same way, our wilderness seasons aren’t just about where God is taking us, but about who He’s shaping us to become.

PURPOSE

In the midst of Joseph's wilderness, he stumbled upon something he never saw coming—perspective. And that perspective gave him clarity about his true purpose. Looking back, he realized that every trial, every setback, was part of a greater plan preparing him for something bigger—God's purpose for his life. The same is true for us. If we can hold on through the tough seasons, we might just discover that our pain was never in vain—it was shaping us for something far greater.

POWER

In the wilderness, we encounter a power far beyond anything we could imagine. But here's the catch: this power isn't found in our strength—it's found in surrender. God uses our desert seasons to strip away our self-centered desires, our agendas, and the impurities that hold us back. It's in this process of letting go that we become vessels ready to be used powerfully by Him.

PRESENCE

In the wilderness, we may gain many things, but there's one treasure that stands above all: a deeper awareness and appreciation of God's Presence. This week, let's explore how the hardest seasons often lead us to the most priceless discovery—the nearness of God like never before.

Conclusion

God is still looking for those who will reflect His character and nature to the world. He is looking for those who will use their God-given authority to bring the influence of heaven to the earth. Every hardship we endure is an opportunity to let go of self-reliance and to discover a power far beyond our own. Every choice we face is a stepping stone toward whom God intended for us to be — faithful managers in this life and the life to come.

“Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities,” (Luke 19:17).

*“You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master,”
(Matthew 25:23).*

2 Timothy 2:12 says that if we endure, we will also reign with Him.

*“To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations,”
(Revelation 2:26).*

“You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth,” (Revelation 5:10).

Group Discussion Questions:

1. What “wilderness test” have you experienced recently? In what ways may God be using this test to transform you into a faithful manager?
2. The Israelites struggled to trust God's provision, often taking matters into their own hands. In what areas of your life do you find it hardest to trust in God's timing or provision? What would trusting God look like in this situation?
3. Luke 16:10 reminds us that being faithful with little prepares us to be entrusted with more. What “small” areas of your life is God asking you to steward faithfully right now? In what ways has God promoted you in the past?