

40 Days in the Wilderness: How God Turns our trials into triumphs
Week 6: PRESENCE (P. Theresa)
March 22-23, 2025

The wilderness is often characterized as a place of hardship, isolation, and uncertainty. Theologically, we learned it represents a season of testing and growth, where individuals wrestle with challenges while seeking relief, revelation, and understanding from God. There are so many things we can gain in our wilderness season. Quick review of the series:

- **Week 2: Preparation**
- **Week 3: Personhood**
- **Week 4: Purpose**
- **Week 5: Power**

But the greatest thing we can gain is a greater awareness and appreciation for God's Presence. To conclude our Wilderness season, I thought it would be powerful to explore Mose's wilderness journey where he discover ultimately that the Promised Land he and the Israelites were seeking was not actually all about the location or place, but rather, a person - God Himself, His very Presence!

Moses is one of the most important figures in the Bible. He is best known for leading the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and guiding them through the wilderness. This journey wasn't just about physical travel; it was a time of significant personal growth and transformation for Moses. His time in the wilderness was crucial for developing his character, understanding who he was, realizing what he was meant to do, finding strength to fulfill that purpose, and most importantly, building a close relationship with God. By exploring Moses' wilderness experience, we can see how God prepares people for their paths and helps them appreciate His presence.

PREPARATION: Moses' Character Formation

Moses, an Israelite, began life in a privileged situation, raised as a member of Pharaoh's household. However, everything changed when he witnessed the harsh treatment of his fellow Israelites. In a fit of rage, he killed an Egyptian guard and then had to run away to Midian (Exodus 2:11-15). This

impulsive action showed that Moses was still immature and needed to grow. His years in the wilderness were essential for shaping his character and preparing him for leadership.

In Midian, Moses spent a lot of time as a shepherd, which was a drastic change from being a prince. Taking care of sheep would have taught him vital qualities such as patience, humility, and compassion. While he tended his flock in solitude, he reflected on his past mistakes and learned valuable life lessons. These years of preparation were crucial; they helped him develop the leadership skills he would need to guide the Israelites.

PERSONHOOD: Moses' true Identity

A key moment in Moses' life came during his encounter with God at the burning bush.

One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led the flock far into the wilderness and came to Sinai, the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush. Moses stared in amazement. Though the bush was engulfed in flames, it didn't burn up. 3 "This is amazing," Moses said to himself. "Why isn't that bush burning up? I must go see it."

4 When the Lord saw Moses coming to take a closer look, God called to him from the middle of the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

"Here I am!" Moses replied.

5 "Do not come any closer," the Lord warned. "Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground. 6 I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." When Moses heard this, he covered his face because he was afraid to look at God" (Exodus 3:1-6 NLT).

This event was not just about meeting God; it was a powerful revelation that showed Moses who he truly was and why he mattered. God called Moses by name, highlighting that he had a special role in His plan. Despite this, Moses struggled with feelings of inadequacy, asking, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”(Exodus 3:11)

God’s reassurances were crucial for Moses. He replied, “I will be with you” (Exodus 3:12). This promise helped Moses begin to see himself differently —not merely as a former prince of Egypt or an exiled shepherd, but as someone chosen by God for a divine purpose. Through these experiences in the wilderness, Moses grew to understand his identity and gained the confidence he needed to lead his people.

PURPOSE: Moses Realizes’ his Calling

Moses’ encounter with God marked the beginning of his journey to fulfill his purpose. God explained that Moses was chosen to lead the Israelites to freedom from slavery (Exodus 3:10). This major task required not just bravery, but also a clear understanding of what God wanted to accomplish.

At first, Moses hesitated and doubted his abilities. However, God provided him with signs and wonders to help strengthen his faith (Exodus 4:1-9). Even after the Lord shows him all these miraculous things, Moses still tries to get out of the assignment.

But Moses pleaded with the Lord, “O Lord, I’m not very good with words. I never have been, and I’m not now, even though you have spoken to me. I get tongue-tied, and my words get tangled.”

11 Then the Lord asked Moses, “Who makes a person’s mouth? Who decides whether people speak or do not speak, hear or do not hear, see or do not see? Is it not I, the Lord? 12 Now go! I will be with you as you speak, and I will instruct you in what to say.” 13 But Moses again pleaded, “Lord, please! Send anyone else.” Exodus 4:10-13 NLT

What happens next is hilarious. Moses does NOT get out of his assignment. Instead the Lord tells him to take his brother Aaron to speak for him. This is significant because God's purpose or calling for your life often involves clear direction and reassurance that God will be with you. The fact that God got angry at Moses when he was trying to making excuses proves that saying "no" to God's call does not release you from the task you were created to do. He may allow you to negotiate, but he commands your obedience. Just as Moses began to accept his role as a leader who is called to deliver his people from slavery in Egypt, you and I must step into our purpose realizing it is vital that we align ourselves with God's will in the wilderness. The good news is we will do this in God's power not our own.

POWER: Moses moves out in God's power

Moses was empowered by God when he confronted Pharaoh, and God's power was evident. The ten plagues that struck Egypt were not just signs of God's judgment; they were demonstrations of the divine authority that worked through Moses (Exodus 7-12). One of the most incredible moments was when Moses led the Israelites through the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21-22). During desperate times, when the people looked to Moses for guidance, it was God's power within him that helped everyone overcome tremendous obstacles.

I think this is why I totally resonate with Moses' story. It's not about him and all about God through him. Amen. Whenever you feel like you are making it about what you have to do, remind your self it is not by might, not by strength but by the Spirit (or the power) of God (Zechariah 4:6) at work in me. This leads us to the final and most important thing - God's power comes from His presence. Turn to your neighbor and say - its all about God's Presence!

PRESENCE: Moses discovers the true Promise Land is not a place but God's Presence

Throughout Moses' time in the wilderness, Moses has a revelation about the most important thing. The beauty of Moses' transformation was his relationship with God. The wilderness became a place where Moses

learned to genuinely connect with God—not just as a figure of authority, but as a faithful and loving God. He had regular encounters with the Manifest Presence of God. So much so, that when he came out of the presence of God, the word tells us his face shined with the Glory of God! However, he was still faced with the sinfulness of his own people. That’s why in a crucial part of the story, God was so fed up with the people he was like just go.

Moses had just come down the mountain with the Ten Commandments and Aaron allowed for the people to create golden idols. Now think about this... it was not God’s original plan to give Aaron authority to help Moses. He did this because Moses was making excuses that he didn’t speak well. So now Moses gotta get before God again and try to atone for their sins.

The Lord said to Moses, “Get going, you and the people you brought up from the land of Egypt. Go up to the land I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I told them, ‘I will give this land to your descendants.’ 2 And I will send an angel before you to drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. 3 Go up to this land that flows with milk and honey. But I will not travel among you, for you are a stubborn and rebellious people. If I did, I would surely destroy you along the way.”

4 When the people heard these stern words, they went into mourning and stopped wearing their jewelry and fine clothes. 5 For the Lord had told Moses to tell them, “You are a stubborn and rebellious people. If I were to travel with you for even a moment, I would destroy you. Remove your jewelry and fine clothes while I decide what to do with you.”6 So from the time they left Mount Sinai, the Israelites wore no more jewelry or fine clothes (Exodus 33:1-6 NLT).

Unfortunately, sometimes you don’t know how much you value something until your about to loose it. Throughout their journey the Israelites always had the presence of the Lord guiding them, protecting them, and providing for them. And in this one moment, God is ready to remove himself from them. Interestingly, it’s not because he hates them. No he loves them. It’s because he doesn’t want to destroy them.

Moses' response to the Lord, would be THE defining moment of his life!

'If your presence does not go,' Moses responded to him, 'don't make us go up from here. How will it be known that I and your people have found favor with you unless you go with us? I and your people will be distinguished by this from all the other people on the face of the earth (Exodus 33:15 HCSB).

Moses' defining moment in life, greatest revelation and discovery, was the only thing that truly matters is God's himself - HIS PRESENCE! You can gain the whole world but if you don't have God's presence you have nothing!

Even Peter has this same defining moment (explain context).

67 "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. 68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God," (John 6:67-69).

NOTE: My defining moment - song "If I had a house on a mountain, but Lord your presence was never there, I'd have nothing. If I had treasures full of diamonds and pearls but Lord your voice I could not hear, I have nothing."

As we can see, Moses' journey through the wilderness is a powerful story of transformation and ultimately a journey into intimacy. What he thought they were gaining was the promised land, but in the end, he realized that what they had was their promise - HIS PRESENCE!

Moses' story teaches us that wilderness seasons, which may feel challenging and lonely, can actually be opportunities for growth and deeper encounters with God. As we allow Him to lead us through our battles, we must remember the most important thing is to treasure and nurture our relationship with God. Our victory is embracing our true identities, walking in personhood, grabbing hold of our unique purpose, and receiving power

to walk this faith journey out in the PRESENCE of almighty God, our ABBA Father. Just like Moses, we can learn that the wilderness is not just a place of trial but a sacred and space where God shapes us for something greater.

OG QUESTIONS:

1. Describe a time when you encountered the Lord in a wilderness season. What did the Lord reveal to you at that time?
2. In what ways can you see evidence in your life that the Lord is with you? How have you prioritized the pursuit of the Lord's presence?
3. What may be some of the stumbling blocks in your life that hinder your intimacy with the Lord and how can you overcome those?
4. Out of the following words (Preparation, Personhood, Purpose, Power, and Presence) which one speaks to you the most in this season and why?