

INTRODUCTION

“Embracing the Wilderness Experience,” I remember the day the title of this book came to me. I had been in the wilderness for quite a few years, and believe it or not I was just getting to the point of acceptance and truly appreciating, that’s right “appreciating” what God was doing in my life.

This revelation came partly from my study on the life of Job. I really began to focus on what he had experienced and not just the losses he suffered but also the range of emotions that he went through. Often times when we hear a sermon preached about Job we are led to believe that Job endured his trials without being discouraged. We are led to believe that Job was “super spiritual”, but a closer look at his life reveals that Job was like the rest of us; he had a period of feeling sorry for himself. He was so saddened by the chain of events that had taken place that he wished that he had never been born (Job 3). But, he was not the only one. After Elijah challenged the false prophets of Baal to a contest (which by the way was supernaturally won by God) he too became despondent when Jezebel threatened to kill him. He ran into the wilderness and begged the LORD to take his life (I Kings 19:1-4).

Now I ask you if these men of God were challenged with having low spirits or having “pity parties” why do we think that we should be any different? Why do we put on “holier-than-thou attitudes” when we know that trouble is furiously knocking on the door? And why is it that we try to make others feel “less than” when they are going through struggles as well? Now this is not a license to

wallow in these parties, but a plea to be honest about your situation.

During tough periods in my life many individuals in their effort to encourage me actually left me emotionally bruised from their “get over it” attitudes. In many instances I was left feeling guilty for not being “high in the spirit” every day-all day. I was constantly made to feel “spiritually inadequate” from the very people I had many times encouraged. But reading and rereading Job’s story helped me to come to terms with my situation. I understood that it was okay to have “down in the mouth” days, but the secret was to not stay there. Job sought the face of the LORD, received a Word of correction and direction and walked into a new blessing, so I begin to do the same.

Prior to my revelation I had stood on *Matthew 21:22: And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive*. I learned this scripture as a child and I had no problems using it again because in times past when I prayed, I believed, and I then received. I named it and then I claimed it. I was able to look back over my life at certain situations when things were rebuked. Poof! They were gone in an instant. Or when there was a need I prayed and presto my need was met! I kicked up my feet and held up my hand, high-fiving any and everyone who was willing to listen to my story.

True, God has given us the power to do that so much so that His Word proclaims that mountains will have to move out of our way. So during those times when the “mountains” were moving, I joyfully recalled Moses parting the Red Sea by speaking in faith. I recalled Daniel

in the Lion's Den and how the lions brought no harm to him. I thought about the three Hebrew boys standing in the middle of the hot furnace that had killed the very men who had thrown them in, and no harm came to them and so there was no problem believing it for myself. I had no reason to doubt God's ability to come to my rescue, but things did not materialize as they had before.

Now perhaps you can relate to what I was going through. To those who are willing to be honest about your life, what is the situation or circumstance that you have been dealing with for weeks, months or perhaps years that will not go away? Perhaps it is your financial situation and you are struggling to make ends meet because of some unforeseen event or even mismanagement on your part. It could be a physical problem with your body which has taken its toll. Or are you dealing with emotional or spiritual issues? And better yet why has it not yet moved? No doubt you have fasted, prayed and anxiously waited for it to go, but alas the mountain has not budged and doesn't appear to have a departing day and you are wondering why.

Well wonder no more because this is a mountain that requires the testing or the stretching of your faith. This mountain will not be moved quickly but comes to make you stronger and to build Christian character. This mountain is to help purge out the things that are not like Christ, so that you and can be of better use to the kingdom. It is called spiritual maturity and it develops after you spend time in the wilderness.

We have often heard the song, "LORD do not move my mountain, but give me the strength to climb." I did not understand this song when I was younger, but now that

I've experience life and God's unwavering love, I understand it. There comes a point in your life when you must accept the trials and tribulations as part of your spiritual growth, it is called *Embracing the Wilderness Experience*. There are times in this walk that you find that we will not always conquer every mountain *immediately*, that there must be some challenges to toughen our resolve. But if we hold on and keep the faith we will discover that this too will pass, and eventually the mountain will move.

The mountain that you are facing today could be a test from the LORD for you to see how committed you are to Him and to His will. Believe me when I say that God knows our hearts, but sometimes we try to fool ourselves. So this mountain allows you time to question your own motives about your walk with Him. Remember the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-22)? He had lived a morally upstanding life and lived by the spiritual teachings from his youth up, but sadly, he had no real faith in God, but his hope and trust was tied up in his wealth.

The mountain could be there to prepare you for you calling as was the case with Moses. It could be a mountain sent by the enemy to turn your faith from the LORD as he tried to do with Job. And of course it could be from being disobedient to the commandments of the LORD as did the Children of Israel. Whatever the reason the mountain has come, know that you will have periods of "feeling lonely and isolated". Friends will seem to disappear, it will seem that no one understands your plight and your heart will become heavy. But this mountain that you are dealing with is your *wilderness experience* and the best thing that you can do is to embrace it. Hey, I was trying to pray it away only to find that it was the very thing that God sent to strengthen me for my call.

Please know that when it is your time, patience and longsuffering are words that you should become well acquainted with. And quite often you will find yourself much like a child on a road trip with his parents, asking the question “Are we there yet?”

In the wilderness there are times that you will feel cut off from family, friends, the world in general and sometimes even God. You will find yourself feeling like Job; you look to the left and the right and He is not there. It is during these times that your faith will truly be tested. You will feel like Hannah wishing for life to enter your barren land. Or perhaps you will feel like Naomi, who appeared to be in a state of constant famine. But know that God has not forsaken you.

There was one point in my life when I thought that God had changed His address and phone number because I was not hearing from Him, nor was I able to find Him. As I was nearing the end of writing this book and I began to feel that my time to crossover was near, tragedy struck my home once more. I was a few weeks away from moving out of my mother’s house to take a job out of town and to start my life over when she was diagnosed with thyroid cancer and immediately following I had to rush her to the hospital to have an emergency tracheotomy performed because her windpipe was 95% closed. It was once again time to believe God as never before. The enemy tried to convince me that my writing was in vain and that God had not called me into ministry, why else was all of this happening? But with time and prayer I came to realize that this situation with my mother was yet another way for me to bless someone else with a testimony of God’s goodness and the miracles that He performs in our life. Just remember that regardless to why you are sent into the

wilderness that God is going to use it for your good so don't cheat or try to take any short cuts, do the work and receive the blessing. Be a true follower of Christ by doing it His way.

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me (Matthew 16:24).

Taking up your cross is what you are doing when you go through the wilderness. You will discover that you must deny yourself the basic creature comforts, wants and desires, but it is all part of the process.

Keep in mind the wilderness experience is often dark and lonely. In Psalms 23:4, it is likened to walking through the valley of the shadow of death. You're constantly having a feeling that life as you know it is over and that death is just around the corner. The only sounds that can be heard are that of your feet trudging through the dry sands of life and that of your own voice, crying out to God for this to be over, screaming that you cannot take anymore, begging for a release. I don't say this to frighten you but I share this based on my experience. It is my desire to prepare you for the journey. The wilderness experience is like being on a roller coaster ride called the MindBender. When you think the ride is going in one direction, you are quickly turned in the opposite direction. I found myself always trying to look ahead to see what turn was coming up next, only to discover that because of the speed and the unexpected turns of the ride, it was impossible to do so. And this is what the wilderness does to you.

You will find yourself trying to bargain with God and making promises that you know you won't keep, just to get Him to release you. I speak from experience when I tell you it's not going to happen. Move in closer and listen: **It won't be over until God says it's over.** And know this that if you do not pass successfully the first time, you must go back again, so pay attention!

When the wilderness experience(s) is over and the mountains finally move you will be so much better for having gone through it. It may not feel like it at the time, because you often feel deprived of your comfort zone, the satisfaction of being around your friends, financial freedom, mental acumen and excellent health, but eventually you will see the fruits of your labor.

I used to wonder why it was that people had illnesses such as cancer, sickle cell anemia, leukemia or lupus. Or why some people were born into impoverished families in drug filled communities. Or why babies were born to couples who desperately wanted them only to have a child born with abnormalities of all degrees. And then I realized that these are mechanisms used to help us to become better people. These are the wildernesses that God uses to perfect (mature) us.

How often have we heard of miraculous recoveries from terminal diseases, or the stories of young men and women who overcame their impoverished conditions only to go on to make millions or the many programs that have been started to aid other children because of one couples devotion to their "special needs child?"

Our wilderness experience can be used to catapult us to higher heights if we embrace it and learn the lessons that it brings.

So decide today to embrace the wilderness experience so that you can become the person that God has predestined you to be.